Secretary

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Summary

Will Graham needs a job. Since quitting the FBI, he's been adrift for months, broken and lost; chasing a desire he doesn't understand in increasingly destructive ways. What he needs is stability, direction, something to help put his life back in order and quiet the buzzing in his head.

A chance encounter with the classifieds might just give him *exactly* what he needs.

Secretary Wanted.
Dr. H. Lecter. Psychiatric private practice.
Typing and good manners essential.
Must follow direction.

Notes

This fic has been a delight to write!

The fic is in three parts and we are beyond thrilled to have had one of the fandom's most gifted artists, the wonderful nephila-clavipes create work for Part 1! Please do pop over to tumblr and tell them how amazing their work is! You can find us over there as well at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup.

See the end of the work for more notes

Chapter 1

It's just an interview. Simple. You're going to walk up to that door and do your best to act normal.

Will Graham knew that shouldn't be a tall order, but lately even simple things had become challenging.

And since when has acting 'normal' ever been a simple thing?

He sat in his car, heavy rain on the windshield beating an impatient staccato, obscuring his view of the stately Baltimore office building that loomed in his peripheral vision.

You can't even look the building in the eye.

'Just focus on the typing. You know how to type.'

...and fight, and bleed, and kill… and have a complete nervous breakdown… and talk to yourself, apparently...

Will let out a heavy sigh, fogging up the windshield, blurring stark reality just enough for him to take stock. He slowly pried his fingers from the steering wheel, flexing his hands, watching as blood flowed back into his pale knuckles. His brows knit together in a scowl as he catalogued their network of bruises and scabs. Accusatory constellations. The ones on his face had cleared at least,

but he had hoped they would all have healed by the time this interview rolled around, or at least be less obvious. He had even made sure to stay out of the bars in the last week… just in case… just to remove the temptation.

Since quitting the FBI… all that ugly business with Hobbs and everything that had happened since… he just didn't trust himself out there.

But you never could entirely trust yourself, could you? Always teetering on the edge. At least Jack and the entire FBI aren't pushing you from behind anymore. And there's nothing about a secretary gig that should send you over a cliff.

Will's sigh threatened to turn into an audible grumble this time. He shook his head, trying to clear his thoughts, scrubbing at his face with both hands.

Enough. You need this.You can't hide in Wolf Trap forever. You need some… direction… some order.

But first you have to get out of the car.

He sat up straighter, tugging at his tie in the rearview mirror. He did his best to set a pleasant smile on his face, but even to him it looked suspiciously like a grimace. His hands pushed and prodded at his hair, trying to force some obedience into curls that had gotten just a bit too long; a haircut having been that *one thing* too many leading up to this.

Just getting ready for this interview had been overwhelming. The world was insinuating itself once again, everything spinning just a bit too fast, a few too many decisions to be made, doubts to squash, impulses to smother. Will knew that work, real work, was what he needed to pull him out of this tailspin, but trying to claw himself out of this downward spiral, to get back at least the semblance of a life, he found that every single step was like fighting against a current. Even the idea of getting a haircut. Will felt like his feet were mired in a streambed that had once given him at least the illusion of place and purpose.

He wanted to work; he had always felt *purpose* in being of service, craved it even. That sacrifice of self at the altar of something bigger than himself; a kind of necessary penance, paid in light of all those dark compulsions he'd tried to keep buried. That was what the FBI had given him. But it had also given him madness, and twisted indulgence, and it had taken more from him than he could bear to lose.

Will gave himself a hard look in the mirror. He certainly didn't look like a killer. Regardless of whether or not Jack had called it *justified*. He didn't look like a violent man.

Probably why they always look so surprised when you land that first punch.

He'd done his best to pretend he could just leave that world behind; be the captain of his little house in Wolf Trap, cast adrift on a lonely but manageable sea. But the world had crept up on him once again.

Or have you been creeping up on it? Stalking from the shadows?

He knew this was closer to the truth.

The truth was Will Graham had been fighting. For months. Since quitting the FBI, he'd been frequenting the worst bars in Wolf Trap, just to find someone volatile and dumb enough to take his

bait. He wasn't proud of it, but that hadn't been enough to stop him.

You don't feel guilty because you always lose.

He knew this was also true, or at least part of the truth. Will didn't fight to win. He fought to let loose that vicious thing inside him just long enough for it to take the edge off, only to go down in a haze of cleansing pain and blood as he purposely let the tables turn. It was in those final moments, the taste of his own blood in his mouth, the sharp thud as someone's flesh impacted his own… Will knew he was going off the rails, but still he felt it *helped* him somehow. The pain cleared out the chaos of his thoughts in a way nothing else could. It left him feeling dirty, but clean, spent but refreshed, shameful but ecstatic all at once.

You can't keep it up though. This isn't sustainable. You have to find something else, something… better. Something healthier.

These same thoughts had been rattling around his head as he'd stumbled from the bar a week ago, still reeling from his last fight; the music from inside muffled and tinny as he'd eased his way down to the curb.

Better that than fall.

It had been a semi-satisfying interaction; the other guy had been quick to turn things around on him, bloodying his nose and getting in a few good kicks when he went down. But as usual, it had been over too quickly, leaving Will chasing a feeling he didn't fully understand but knew he needed; one he had no idea how to satisfy or why he even wanted to.

He'd bled all over the sleeve of his shirt before fishing a newspaper out from the top of a garbage can to wipe his face.

Not your finest moment.

At least he had forced himself to go for the middle part of the paper - cleaner he hoped - fishing for the classifieds since no one ever looked at those anymore. Wiping the blood from his face, he'd sat down heavily on the curb once again, completely at a loss for what to do next, only sure that he had to do *something*. Something more than this. Some kind of direction.

Is this rock bottom?

He still couldn't be sure why he'd bothered to uncrumple that bloody newspaper - probably just hoping to distract himself from the despair that had hovered around that thought - but there, in stark, classic lettering swimming under bright crimson, had been something that had felt surprisingly like a possible answer...

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Will let his gaze drift away from the rearview to eye the front door of the office one last time. It had all seemed so simple there on the curb. Something to focus on. Something to drown out the endless buzz and whir of his traitorous and overactive mind. Something… normal.

Must follow direction.

He'd balked at that, of course; he'd always been one to buck at authority… salty with his superiors and sullen when forced to work with others… it had always stood directly at odds with his desire to be useful; but there was something about that simple line that had resonated with him in some way, something that hinted at that quiet calm he had associated with the taste of blood in his mouth.

Direction.

Secretary.

It had felt right, somehow. It still did.

So get out of the car.

It was almost a relief to step out into the lashing rain. Will slammed the door decisively, locked the car and scowled up at the gothic facade.

Time to fish or cut bait.

There was no list of names on the steel plate screwed into cream stone. Just one: Dr H Lecter. And only one buzzer.

He owns the fucking building?

A couple of deep breaths, a hand passed over gleaming wet hair in another sorry attempt to tame it, and he pushed the button. A few seconds and he was buzzed in.

He's not going to check who I am?

Curiosity shouldered aside his natural caution and he stepped into a cool, tiled vestibule. Before him, a second door, leading presumably to the doctor's office. Will had barely enough time to wipe his shoes on the mat before the sound of footsteps, and the inner door swung open, and he found himself face to face with the most striking man he had ever laid eyes on. Immaculate side swept hair, tawny, clipped to frame an angular face. Enigmatic eyes and a polite, professional smile. A tall, athletic frame hugged by a suit in various shades of red, patterns clashing madly, the whole effect at once daring and quaint. Confidence exuded in the tilt of his head, his economy of movement.

Sharp. Precise. He's all edges.

Bizarrely, the thought calmed him.

'Mr Graham.' His voice was deep and mellow. Granular. Sweet.

Fuck.

'Doctor Lecter?'

'Indeed. And thank you for being punctual. Please, come in.'

Said the spider to the fly.

Cursing his wayward thoughts, Will followed the doctor inside, and found himself in a small but well-appointed outer office.

‘This is where you would work.’

Wooden desk, typewriter (*typewriter? For show, surely...*), maroon rug, a couple of antique chairs, some kind of spiky plant growing halfway up one grey wall. Off to the right, a narrow corridor opened out into what was clearly a waiting area.

‘And this is the main entrance to my office.’ Doctor Lecter nodded towards a frost-panelled wooden door in front of them and gestured for Will to precede him. ‘I have a separate exit for patients.’

He’s so economical. Eloquent. With his body. With his words. Bet his office is a monument to minimalism: whitewashed walls and a sleek glass desk.

He opened the door and stepped inside. His eyes widened. Three grey walls and one red.

Really red.

Floor-to-ceiling red and grey-striped drapes.

Bold colours for a psychiatrist’s office.

Galleried, colonnaded, filled with artifacts, books, paintings, cabinets, a rosewood desk. A mishmash of styles. And yet somehow it worked. Something about a clarity of taste.

He makes art out of chaos.

Taking a seat behind his undeniably solid desk - upon which Will spotted a copy of his resume that he had emailed over the previous week - Doctor Lecter indicated a chair set just in front.

‘Please, sit down.’

Will did so, uncomfortably aware of that cataloguing, calculating gaze. *He sees everything.* The doctor’s eyes flicked to Will’s hands, pressed tightly together, the criss-cross of scars on his knuckles telling their own sordid story. *He sees too much.* It made him feel vulnerable. Exposed. Instantly he wanted to shove his hands between his knees. *Hide the evidence. No, stay still.* But it was an effort. And he felt with a sting the aesthetic differences between them.

Shabby versus chic.

‘Tell me a little about yourself.’

Hands clasped before him, elbows resting on the polished wood, Doctor Lecter smiled politely, eyes fixed on Will’s face. Immediately, Will felt pinned in place.

Trapped in amber.

When he failed to reply, the doctor’s eyebrows lifted fractionally.

He’s not used to being kept waiting. Interesting.

‘How did you get here this morning?’

‘Car.’

‘Is it your own?’

‘Yes.’

‘Do you live in an apartment?’

‘House.’

‘In Wolf Trap, Virginia.’

‘Uh huh.’

That earned him a raised eyebrow.

Why am I testing him? Why do I want to?

‘Not an inconsiderable distance.’

‘An hour and a half drive.’ Will shrugged, noting how the doctor pursed his lips at the gesture.

And at the closed answers?

The idea that he might be sassing himself out of the job gave him pause. When had he gotten so defensive? He forced himself to unfold arms he hadn’t even realised he’d crossed.

Maybe it’s time to give a little.

‘I like long commutes. Gives me time to think. And I worked in the city before… before…’

‘Yes, I am aware,’ Doctor Lecter cut in smoothly.

With eyes still intent on him, the doctor picked up a slim remote device and pressed a button. Instantly, pinpricks of light drew Will’s attention to a mossy diorama of exotic flowers showcased on a tall plinth within a delicate hoop of gold. Another click released a mist of water, highlighted in swathes of silver, fine droplets kissing the surface of the delicately bowed petals.

‘Nice black orchids. Unusual.’

‘Thank you. Baker’s Dark Angel. A particularly fine species. Of course, their appearance is deceptive. The only truly black orchids are found in the jungles of Papua, New Guinea, but it is illegal to remove them from the island.’

Will took a breath, collecting himself. Fascinated by the doctor’s sudden animation. Grateful for the segue.

Almost as if he knew I needed a moment.

‘I imagine your clients find them soothing.’

‘Yes, I suppose they would.’

A short pause and the interrogation began anew. ‘Do you live alone?’

Will cleared his throat. ‘Yeah. That is, I have dogs, but yeah...yes.’

‘How many dogs?’

A stain of colour rose to his cheeks. ‘Seven. I have a habit of collecting strays,’ he added, a trifle defensively.

‘Admirable.’ The doctor’s tone gave nothing away, but there followed a sensual almost-smile.

Sensual? Where the hell did that come from?

Will lowered his gaze.

‘Not fond of eye contact, are you?’

‘Eyes are distracting.’

As, it turns out, are downturned, sculpted lips. And cultured, accented voices. And loud check suits teamed with floral ties.

‘Do you have a significant other?’

Will looked up, bristling again. ‘May I ask how that’s relevant?’

The doctor stared back at him, unblinking. ‘My previous secretary was predisposed to romantic whims. Followed her heart to the United Kingdom. I am looking for reliability.’

‘Okay,’ Will answered slowly, arrested by sudden realisation.

I can’t anticipate his train of thought. Perhaps that’s why I find him so compelling.

Will eyed the man in front of him before formulating an answer. The doctor's eyes seemed to support and challenge him in equal measure, an almost imperceptible smile flirting across full lips, betraying a sort of amused curiosity. It sent a strange jolt through his stomach.

Perhaps that's not all I find compelling.

‘I guess that’s fair. And the answer’s no. It’s just me, and that’s the way I like it.’

It wasn’t bravado. Being gifted with empathy was anything *but* a gift when it meant being able to see right through the most watertight of date-cancelling excuses. Or knowing instantly when someone you were attempting to flirt with started zoning out. Thinking about their ex. Or their dinner. Or the weather.

‘Hm. Have you ever won an award?’

Finally, an easy one.

‘Yes.’

Although...

‘For what did you win the award?’

‘Typing.’ He tried not to spit the word out.

‘I see.’ Doctor Lecter tilted his head fractionally, assessing. ‘You distinguished yourself as a police officer in New Orleans before going on to study forensic science at George Washington University; your subsequent work for the FBI’s Violent Crimes division was so outstanding, it earned you teacher tenure at the FBI Academy; yet it is your award for typing that you choose to speak of.’

‘It’s my award for *typing* that will get me the job, isn’t it?’

Again the slight smile. ‘You don’t wish to discuss your past career?’

‘I don’t wish to be psychoanalysed.’

Please don’t get boring.

‘I’m sorry, Will. Observing is what we do. I can’t shut mine off any more than you can shut yours off, ex-FBI or not. It’s ingrained in both of us.’

Will. We. Us. Unexpectedly intimate and unsettlingly pleasant. *Nope, definitely not boring.*

The doctor pulled towards him a leather bound notebook and plucked from it a handwritten sheet of paper.

‘Would you take this through to the outer office and type it up, please?’

Slightly taken aback, Will hesitated, before reminding himself wryly that this was, after all, a big part of the job for which he was applying.

‘Of course.’ A hint of mischief prompted him to add, ‘Sir.’

Doctor Lecter paused, hand outstretched, and his eyes narrowed slightly. Will was entirely unprepared for the consequent kick of arousal that caused him to blush for the second time, and he almost grabbed the sheet from the doctor’s grasp in his hurry to absent himself.

Well, that came back around to bite you on the ass. Nice one.

Closing the office door behind him with a soft click, he leaned against it momentarily before remembering that his outline would still be visible, frosted glass or not. He jerked away, cursing beneath his breath, and his eyes fell to the page he was gripping.

Fine paper. Oyster. Textured. Sloping handwriting. Extravagant. He’s used a fountain pen. A fucking expensive one.

He headed for the desk, placed the paper down and smoothed out the creases. Looked around for a computer, laptop, tablet. Anything remotely electronic. Nothing. Just the blue Selectric II typewriter (*again, fucking expensive*) that he’d sneered at on his way in.

Joke’s on you.

A quick recce of the desk drawers revealed paper and ribbon. One part of him seethed at the associations. *What’s next? Coffee with sugar, Sugar?* But another part - the part that had brought

him here in the first place - drew comfort from the utter simplicity of the task.

Thread the ribbon, insert the paper, clackety clack. Job done. Order followed. Mind quiet.

It was a short piece, and he was almost finished before he registered what he was typing.

Poi la svegliava, e d'esto core ardendo
Lei paventosa umilmente pascea:
Appresso gir lo ne vedea piangendo.

Is he a romantic or a satirist?

Amused, he walked back through to the main office with an unaccustomed spring in his step, brow quirked.

'You're not about to ask me to eat a burning heart out of your hand are you, Doctor?'

He handed over both sheets to his prospective employer, who responded without missing a beat.

'Not until I have checked your references thoroughly.'

Touche.

He sat back down. Doctor Lecter leaned forward, eyes intent. Will found himself mirroring the gesture. It was hypnotic, this pull.

'Do you really wish to be my secretary, Will?'

My secretary. A hop, skip and a jump from my to mine.

A jolt of warmth spread through his belly. He licked his lips. Dark eyes followed the movement.

Do I want this?

'I really do.'

'You scored more highly than anyone I have ever interviewed, although given your background that is hardly surprising. You must know that you are overqualified for this position.'

Will swallowed, an unpleasant thought curdling in his belly.

Is he going to reject me? After all this?

'Yet you chose to interview me anyway,' he shot back, resenting how unsettled even the *prospect* of rejection made him feel.

Vulnerable. Abandoned. (Abandoned? When did I start expecting something from this?)

'I was curious.'

'And now?'

Hanging on for a favourable verdict. Hating how much it mattered.

‘I am still curious. This is a long way from the FBI, Will. In my considered opinion, you would be bored to death.’

‘I want to be bored.’ He spat it out; couldn’t prevent the emphatic tone. No longer a game. No longer a case of idle curiosity or something to get him out of the house, out of his toxic headspace, out of his mind...

Fuck. I really want this job.

Their eyes locked. A gleam turned the doctor’s gaze to warm honey. Inviting and comforting.

Rewarding.

‘You intrigue me, Will. At the risk of being accused once again of psychoanalysing you, I would say that you are very - closed off.’

Will took a slow, deep breath. The finishing line was tantalisingly close.

Don’t blow it now. Be honest. Give a little.

‘I build forts. Old habit.’

The gleam intensified. ‘Then let’s see if we can’t break it, Mr Graham.’

They shared a smile. It tasted sweet.

One final thought.

This could get addictive.

Chapter 2

Here you are, ready to do battle with a coffee machine.

Will was determined to master the ridiculous thing, but he was beginning to think of it as his nemesis. It looked more like a chemistry set than a coffee maker.

A chemistry set for the Earl of somewhere.

Even two weeks into his job, Will was convinced that all his degrees and experience hadn't prepared him to face such an adversary. But Doctor Lecter had been adamant from day one that he learn how to brew from it properly, so Will was determined not to let it get the better of him.

Just think of it as a boat motor.

A fancy, gold, boat motor.

For the Earl of somewhere.

Will huffed a low chuckle, but set to work. He had already hung his coat neatly on the hook by the front door and tucked his bag unobtrusively beneath his little desk. He'd checked the messages and appointments for the day, and tended to the wall of exotic plants in reception. Now it was time for coffee.

Just as he had been told to do.

Another day. Same dance. Strange, the comfort in routine.

As he worked, Will could still hear the doctor's voice reverberating at the back of his mind, that velvet tone with its ironclad lining. That tone had worked its way into him somehow. He could still hear it, as if Doctor Lecter stood at his shoulder throughout the day, guiding him through, observing him, dissecting him, perfecting his actions through each task expected of him. Their conversations in those first few days were seared on his memory.

'I will show you once how to complete a task, but I expect you to apply yourself thereafter. You are an intelligent and capable man, Will. I have no doubt you will rise to every challenge. I am not unreasonable enough to expect perfection immediately, but I do expect effort.'

'And I'm sure this thing will take a lot of effort.' Grumbling already. Trying to make sense of what should be a simple machine.

He can't stop himself; runs a finger through its open flame. One second of bright, but welcome heat, a momentary comfort. Focus. Sharp eyes track his every movement.

'And what beauty can be produced without struggle, Will? Whatever tastes so sweet as that which triumphs through challenge?'

That smile. Goading. Mischievous. Appraising. Testing.

'Beautiful, challenging coffee. Check.'

A raised eyebrow for that.

'I take my coffee at nine thirty. I ask that you greet me with it in my office at that time, and only once your other morning tasks are complete. In addition to coffee, you will be expected to have my messages sorted and a firm grasp on my schedule before coming to me. You are also responsible for the living wall in reception.'

'So the plants get their drink before you do? Hardly seems fair.' Salty. A touch mocking. He can't help himself. Still resistant, but intrigued nonetheless. Who is this man?

'I also expect you to be polite, Mr. Graham.' A swift rebuke. No hesitation. Storm clouds passing over warm amber, sparking their warning. 'Rudeness is unspeakably ugly to me, the one sin I will not tolerate.'

Only one? Another quip hovers on his tongue, but he forces it down. He has promised himself he will try. A deep breath. It feels like dropping a shield… just a bit. It feels… good.

'I'm… sorry, Doctor. Really. Old habits. Old forts. Please, just… tell me what you want me to do.'

Sharp eyes hold him, a warning before release. Tension drains, but not all the way. Probation before indulgence. The smile warms once again, but there is something dark beneath that well-crafted person suit, something that resonates with the thing that sits inside his own heart, something hungry. He is definitely intrigued. Suspects it goes both ways.

'I expect you will find me… exacting, Will. But do not mistake the clarity of my directions for discourtesy. I will say this once. I have no interest in belittling you, and you are far too interesting to mock. But I do know what I want, and that includes a secretary who is equally invested in the dynamic of perfection. I hope that person is you.'

That early exchange echoed through Will's head while he waited for the coffee maker to *bloody do something*. He had to admit, the thing did make incredible coffee when it cooperated, and it suited Doctor Lecter to a tee.

The dynamic of perfection.

To his relief, a smooth gurgle signaled that the water had finally begun to siphon properly. But that wasn't the only thing that brought a private smile to his face, albeit not without a certain ruefulness. The memory of Doctor Lecter's words lingered with him as he released a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

Apparently I also want that person to be me. Most of the time.

As if that thought brought forth its own liquid gold, Will finally managed to draw coffee from the damn thing. Triumphant, he let the tension drain out of him as the coffee poured into the glass mug. It looked and smelled just right, dark and rich and exotic. He placed the mug on a silver tray, complete with napkin and the day's mail, wiping one errant drop off the tray before moving towards the office door. Pausing a moment, he made sure to check the clock.

9:28. Wait. Pull yourself together.

Will tried to center himself, shaking off the battle he had just fought, straightening his glasses and doing his best to flatten down the front of his rumpled shirt. It was strange how the ritual of the

morning built to its own kind of climax; how he couldn't help but thrum with a certain amount of anticipation as he watched for the clock to strike 9:30, waiting to bring Hannibal his morning coffee, perfectly prepared.

When did it become Hannibal over Doctor Lecter? Don't let yourself slip with that. And since when do you care so much about how well someone thinks you've made their coffee? Or the state of your shirt, for that matter?

Will wasn't sure he wanted to analyze that any further; in fact he had been doing his best over the past few weeks not to dwell on those particular sorts of questions.

Maybe since that someone looks like the devil in a three piece suit...

Will tried to shake the traitorous thought out of his head.

What the hell is the matter with you?

He didn't have time for this. The clock had struck. He took a deep breath and eased himself into Hannibal's office.

'Good morning, Doctor Lecter.'

As always, Hannibal was already there, perfectly composed at his desk. He was always there first, no matter how early Will arrived.

He must never sleep.

Hannibal looked up, his expression pleasant, suit and hair immaculate as always.

Still all sharp edges. But what's hiding around those corners?

'Good morning, Will.'

Hannibal set down his pen carefully, closing his notebook to move it precisely to the corner of his desk. His eyes never left Will as he set his desk to rights; pinning him in place, assessing, but still warm, welcoming.

Pleased?

'I trust you slept well.'

'Sure, yeah.'

Clumsy. Do better.

It was funny how manners still required such an effort. He'd jettisoned them years before in a concerted effort to cultivate a certain distance from people… the saltier he had been, the more likely to be left alone. But Will was surprised to find that he didn't entirely mind making a go at politeness, at least here in Hannibal's office. There was something almost refreshing in it, like opening a window inside himself; just a crack, just enough to let some air in.

Strange to dismantle walls with what I used to build them.

‘I mean, yes… thank you, Doctor Lecter.’

A lie of course, but only a partial one. Will still lay in bed every night, antsy, agitated, trying not to think about going to the bar, or dwell on the strange relief he knew it would give him. If he did manage to sleep, he was still plagued by nightmares, full of blood and guilt, waking most nights covered in sweat and breathing hard. But he had to admit, he’d been sleeping better in these past few weeks working for Hannibal than he had in years. It was as if something akin to *possibility* had begun to permeate the fabric of his dreams, twining itself among the threads of need and compulsion to weave something new… as if all he had to do was turn another corner and he might find whatever it was that could satisfy the insatiable craving that stalked him.

As usual, Hannibal watched him keenly as he stood there, as if he could read his thoughts simply through force of will. Will had gotten more used to this kind of dissection; was learning not to fidget or cast his eyes about the room, but it still took his own act of will to stand still and return that piercing gaze.

What does he see?

‘Perhaps you will sleep better tonight.’

Everything.

‘I trust you have what you need to begin your day?’

This was Hannibal’s subtle cue for him to get back on track; a gentle nudge to get on with things.

To do what is asked of you. Simple. Clean. Calm.

‘Right. Your first appointment is at ten with Mr. Tier. You scheduled him in for two hours this time, so that takes you to Mr. Gumb at noon. But your back-to-back afternoon appointments with Mason and Margot Verger were cancelled again. Mason left a… message… of sorts… but that leaves a chunk of your afternoon completely open. The next and last appointment isn’t until four-thirty with Ms Komeda regarding the symphony gala. I think she’s going to ask you to host the cocktail party.’

As one annoyance piled on the other, he could feel Hannibal’s mood shifting, like the hint of ozone in the atmosphere just before a storm. As always, his composure was unshakable, but Will caught just the barest hint of a snarl on Hannibal’s lip. It made the hair on the back of his neck stand up.

Don’t just stand there. Give him the coffee.

Will moved closer, steps measured. Hannibal’s eyes followed him the whole way. Anger piqued, there was a darkness in them now, coiled and shifting, almost predatory. Something hungry for satiation that eyed him like prey. It sent a strange but somehow familiar thrill through Will’s body; something electric, something reckless.

‘Right… well, the good news is, I think I may have finally coaxed the coffee machine into submission.’

Careful.

But sometimes *careful* was a losing game.

‘Maybe now you can trade out some of that bitter taste in your mouth.’

He was gratified at the slight twitch he caught in Hannibal's brow; registering his sass, hovering somewhere between indulgence and warning. Hannibal sat back in his seat, crossing his legs elegantly at the knee, open, but dangerous somehow. Will could feel himself being drawn in, like a moth flirting with a flame. He took the opportunity to close the distance between them.

'Maybe I should also bring you something to eat. From the looks of it, you better get something in your stomach before you take a bite out of Mason… or the messenger.'

Pushing. Sometimes he found himself wondering just how much it would take, curious to see what that thing inside Hannibal would do if it wasn't caged by decorum and a fancy suit. What it might do to *him* if he could just coax it out...

That's enough now. He's your boss, not one of those guys at the bar. Don't blow this.

Will set the coffee down gently, barely a ripple to mar its surface. In a moment of inspiration, perhaps even contrition, he turned the tray so that the handle of the mug would be just where Hannibal would naturally reach for it. *Just so.* It felt… good to have thought of it.

'I can assure you, Will, when my appetite is sufficiently piqued, I will be sure to come and find you.'

His stomach lurched, and he was suddenly very aware of how closely Hannibal was eyeing him… pinned in place beneath glittering amber.

But Hannibal eventually let him go, dropping his eyes to his daytimer, his expression darkening once again as he drew a heavy red line through Mason Verger's name. It was strange, Will knew he should just go, but he found himself hesitating, wanting to do… *something* to bring the warmth back to Hannibal's steely gaze, hoping to coax back that hint of enigmatic smile he had begun to find so surprisingly comforting.

'Is there anything else, Doctor? Outside of the usual, I mean? Can I… do anything?'

The words came out awkwardly but, he hoped, sincerely.

Your sincerity is as rusty as your manners.

But he was rewarded with a ghost of a smile that nonetheless lit up Hannibal's features, the shadow passing. Try as he might, and try he had, Will still couldn't assign that smile any better description than *charming.*

And isn't charming one small step away from coaxing? But which one of you is the snake and which holds the flute?

'Such a genuine offer is enough, Will, thank you. For now, just the coffee will do, and you can start on the rest of your assignments. I expect I will have something extra for you in my office this afternoon. It will just be the two of us, after all.'

The two of us.

Will recognised that as the gentle dismissal it was. Polite but firm. And if he was being honest, he already found himself anxious to get started on the day's tasks. He had learned quickly that

Hannibal had exacting standards and expectations. There was a lot to do, and do properly. He nodded and turned to leave.

‘Oh, and Will, leave the door open until Mr. Tier arrives. And move your desk to where I can see it from here.’

What?

‘What?’

Will’s exclamation slipped out of his mouth before he could catch it, his steps faltering. He could feel blood rushing to his cheeks and resolved not to turn around.

Are you actually blushing? Don’t you dare *let him see.*

He hated being caught on his back foot. His first instinct, as always, was to throw salt.

‘Since when are secretaries so interesting that they need an audience?’

The silence was glacial. Hannibal’s eyes felt like they were boring holes in the muscles of his back, tension thrumming between them. Still, Will refused to turn around, his face still burning, eyeing the distance to his reception desk, an escape that was no longer an escape.

‘Were my instructions unclear, Will?’

That tone. It coiled inside of him and pulled tight. Dangerous but silken, iron wrapped in velvet. Hannibal never raised his voice, but that tone brooked no argument.

Fix it.

Ego aside, he had to admit the thought of Hannibal’s eyes on him while he finished his morning work… assessing, appraising, hopefully approving… it sent an unnerving but visceral roll through his stomach.

Answer him.

‘No… I heard you. I mean… fine, Doctor Lecter, if that’s what you want.’

His own voice sounded strange to his ears, but Hannibal’s tone warmed immediately,

‘Good, Will. That is what I want. And to answer your question, I do find you that interesting.’

Will didn’t think his face could have gotten any hotter. Flattered, annoyed, gratified… irritated that such a simple request could get under his skin like this… his face was on fire and he was still desperate to get out without turning around.

But he’s going to see you anyway. He’s going to see everything.

The thought startled him, but not altogether unpleasantly.

No one has ever tried to see you before. Not really. At least not someone so… intriguing.

It was like a knot inside him loosened imperceptibly.

‘So... should I move the desk before I sharpen the pencils?’

Objectively, Will *knew* that it was a ridiculous question. But there it was. A strange imperative. An ode to just how deeply Hannibal’s expectations had taken root inside him already. Will was usually expected to sharpen Hannibal’s drawing pencils (*again, ridiculously expensive*) after bringing his coffee (*also ridiculous*) and before beginning his typing (*on that goddamn typewriter*). But that was the routine that Hannibal had taught him, and strange as it was, Will had gotten used to it. Liked it even. To add a new step to the dance…

Just tell me what you want me to do.

‘Yes, Will. Do it now. I would like to watch how you’re progressing with the scalpel.’

Satisfied, if still a little off balance, Will nodded and quickly strode from the room, forward momentum a necessity.

He set to work, moving his desk into Hannibal’s direct line of sight, placing himself right in front of the open doorway. Hannibal’s eyes followed him from his office, connecting them like an invisible tether. It took an act of self-control for Will to let go and relax into it. Still, he couldn’t help throwing Hannibal a rueful look across the distance between them as he took his seat.

Well, you wanted to see me. Here I am. Do I get my gold star now?

Was that a smile on Hannibal’s face? It was hard to tell, but he seemed pleased. Satisfied. Which, in turn, satisfied something inside Will, something he wasn’t quite ready to examine too closely.

Your submission to observation is just one more explicit instruction.

He had to admit, buck as he might sometimes, over these past weeks Will had gotten used to the comfort of knowing exactly what was expected of him. He found it quieted his mind in a way he hadn’t expected. He always knew what he should be doing, and how, and he knew that he could rely on Hannibal to correct him if he went off course. In a way, it was something that he had always been looking for. Never really able to trust himself, he had always secretly hoped for someone in his life he could trust enough to anchor him. It was what Jack had promised to be for him at the FBI, before casting him adrift without a paddle.

Does that mean you trust Hannibal to be your paddle?

He didn’t know the answer to that. Not yet. Even the question unnerved him.

You barely know him. Not really.

He suspected no one did. The man’s artifice was his art. But Will was intrigued; more than he’d been about anyone in a long time.

Anyway, who says he’d even want to be your paddle? Who would?

A sigh dropped from him like a stone in water. He shifted in his seat, hoping the ripples of it wouldn’t reach as far as Hannibal’s desk. Rubbing at the back of his neck, Will tried to focus on the task at hand, pulling the scalpel from the drawer and setting to work sharpening each of Hannibal’s drawing pencils.

It didn't take long before he was completely absorbed in his task, the scalpel an extension of that focus, searching for a perfect point. It was almost enough to allow him to forget that Hannibal was watching. But his voice still spoke to him as he worked, collected and smooth, stalking him from the memory of those first lessons...

'You will sharpen my pencils in the morning once you have brought my coffee. I often sketch between appointments, and a fine line cannot be made without a precise point. I learned early that a scalpel cuts better points than a pencil sharpener.'

A blade produced as if from air. Uncomfortably close. He holds his ground, even as the light glinting off its edge sends an electric current through his gut. He knows this is a test. This is all *a test.*

'It is important to me that you take pride in your work here, Will. There are far too many who underestimate the pleasure to be found in elevating life's simple tasks. Take your time. Focus.'

Sharp, cold metal producing showers of tiny hardwood slivers like confetti. Strong hands guiding him. By example first. Then covering his own like a second skin.

'And if I cut myself?' A little breathless. Suddenly very aware of the wounds on his knuckles.

'Happens to the best of us. Don't be ashamed to shed a little blood, Will. We are all of us merely meat on the inside. Just refrain from getting it on any of my outgoing letters.' Eyes twinkling. Amused.

The memory of that exchange never failed to stir something inside him; Hannibal standing so close, the feel of his hands on his own. Will tried to shake it off as he walked back into the office with the sharpened pencils.

He knew he was getting better with the blade, and he couldn't deny the surprising swell of pride inside him, like a small ember he had all but forgotten about until Hannibal's praise had begun to breathe it back into glowing life. He felt it now, stoked under Hannibal's approving inspection as he turned the pencils this way and that in the light from the window.

'You are doing very well, Will. An improvement to be sure. Remember to keep your hand supple as you carve, allow your grip to loosen, let your tension flow out through the blade. Find comfort in each cut.'

If you only knew.

Hannibal's eyes fixed on him as if reading his mind once again. An almost imperceptible smile made Will wonder if he actually could.

Honestly, since when do you blush?

Hannibal didn't break his gaze as he put down the pencils and held up a stack of notes.

'Here are yesterday's notes for you to type... and one with corrections.'

The world came crashing back. Will's brows knit together; frustrated, but mostly with himself. He had tried to be so careful. He had to stop himself from swiping the notes right out of Hannibal's hand, forcing himself to take hold of the folder gently. But Hannibal didn't let go of it right away;

instead he held him there, searching his face, flaying him open, waiting to see if he would buck. Will felt his breath stutter as a finger brushed against his own.

Fuck.

‘I’ll go fix them now.’

He tried to keep his voice even, but it still came out close to a whisper.

Hannibal released the folder with an imperceptible smile.

‘Good, Will.’

Will drew a deep breath as he slowly returned to his desk, forcing himself not to hurry, the sound of Hannibal’s early instruction once again reverberating in his mind.

‘You will correct these notes, Will, now. Errors will happen, but sloppiness betrays a lack of pride. You should be proud of the work you do here, and every stroke of red pen shows me the amount of… encouragement… you will need.'

Fine white paper riddled with red, slashing at words like knife wounds, bleeding through. They cut him just as deep, sharp and surprising, but also oddly welcome, familiar, like the taste of blood in his mouth.

‘Since when does a red pen spell encouragement, Doctor?’ Still salty. Still at war with his promise to himself.

‘Encouragement comes in many forms, Will, as do lessons. We will start with the red pen. All correction represents an opportunity… a chance to learn what we are capable of. My corrections might seem like reprimands, but at the heart of the matter, each strike should teach you that I care.’ A fascinating twist of logic. Tempting. He finds he wants it to be true.

‘Well then, I guess whatever strike comes after the red pen must be love.’ Cavalier words, said before he can catch them. He stumbles to fix it but is arrested by an enigmatic smile, and the answering electric current under his skin.

Will’s face flushed once again with the memory of that exchange.

Just type, dammit.

He sat down at his desk and readied his typewriter.

Ribbon. Paper. Set.

Breathe.

Finally he opened the folder. Three mistakes. Not too terrible, but the circles of red pen on the page still screamed out at him, more effective than a raised voice could ever be. Not that Hannibal ever raised his voice. He didn’t need to.

Each strike should teach you that I care.

Will typed the letter again. Read it again.

Fuck.

He typed it again.

He remembered the first time he had been stuck in this kind of loop; battling with himself, battling with the typewriter, typing and retyping Hannibal's notes. Hannibal had been patient, but stern, that red pen ever-present.

'Type it again, Will.'

'Do it again.'

'Again.'

His little desk is littered with white paper, bleeding red. Everything is caught. Nothing missed. He bristles, naturally succumbing to mounting frustration.

'You're enjoying this, aren't you? Only a sadist has this many red pens.'

But he is met with only a chuckle, deep and rich, goading… and another paper dripping with red.

'Again, Will.'

He's lost count of the editions, the iterations. The clack of the keys becomes almost meditative, blurring with the doctor's voice. Again. Again. Again. Always that tone. Impossible to deny. Infuriating, compelling, comforting; tying knots inside him just to untie them again.

But as he types the notes again and again, awash in red ink and effort, he begins to find that it gives him something else… something… unexpected.

Calm. Comfort.

It washes through him, crowding out the resentment. He begins to see the pattern, tracing the outlines of Hannibal's design. Each iteration underscores the truth in his words… every strike an opportunity for encouragement, a lesson in care. With each correction he gets better. With every clean page and warm smile comes mounting pride. Hannibal is like a built-in safety net, a security of standards, holding him tight so he can let go…

It had been a lesson Will needed more than he'd known.

Did he see that too?

That calm was already spreading through him now as he worked to correct the offending notes. He imagined a comforting hand coming to rest on his shoulder, warm but firm, the pressure of strong fingers just enough to remind him that even in comfort can lie command.

You want him to tell you it's perfect.

He knew it was true, but it never failed to unnerve him. When he had first heard those words, he had been startled by the feeling that had flowed through him with Hannibal's praise. Even now, he couldn't help but hold his breath as he returned the notes to Hannibal and watched as he looked them over.

‘Well done, Will. These are perfect. Perhaps you don’t need more than the red pen after all, hmm?’

Hannibal said it with a twinkle in his eye, but Will had to dig his fingernails into his palms as he felt his stomach flip. All manner of retorts sprung to mind, none of them appropriate. He bit them back behind clenched teeth.

Drop it. It was just a joke.

But something in Hannibal’s smile made him wonder. Something that flickered behind his eyes. Like a challenge.

Or an invitation…

The light metallic jingle of the front doorbell cut through the moment. Mr. Tier had arrived. Will didn’t know if he wanted to thank him for his punctuality or curse him.

‘Please show Mr. Tier in, Will, and close the door behind you. You can finish the rest of your typing and then eat your lunch.’

And just like that, the person suit was buttoned up once again, that cool exterior slamming down like a portcullis, unbreachable.

The good doctor builds forts of his own.

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The rest of the morning and early afternoon passed uneventfully, Will’s mind eventually slipping into stillness as he worked, lulled by the rhythmic sound of the keys under his fingers and hushed voices from the other room. Like wading into the quiet of a stream, it offered relief.

Will ate lunch at his desk. A simple sandwich he’d brought with him. Hannibal rarely ate lunch and often saw clients right through the lunch hour.

‘I am very careful about what I put into my body, Will. As should you be. Which means I prepare most meals myself. I often choose to have a hearty breakfast and work through lunch. I prefer to cook a more… involved dinner at home in the evening. I ask that you bring your lunch with you so that you are here to greet my clients when they arrive, but I expect you to eat it. I can’t have you going hungry on me.’

He was just finishing up when he heard the back door open and close; Mr Gumb using the client’s exit. He listened as Hannibal’s even steps approached the door to reception, his shadow growing larger through the frosted panes.

The two of us.

His heart beat a little faster as he remembered Hannibal’s words from the morning. But he didn’t have time to dwell before Hannibal opened the door. He had removed his jacket and stood there in his shirt and vest, rolling his sleeves up to expose lean, well-muscled forearms. There was the hint of a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

Like a cat who wants to play with his dinner.

‘I believe we have some time to fill, Will. Would you care to join me in my office?’

I guess that makes me dinner.

He waited a breath for that thought to bother him, finding instead only a simmering kind of anticipation.

‘Whatever you say, Doctor. You’re the boss.’

Will brushed by him on the way into his office, perhaps a little closer than necessary. Hannibal followed him inside, close behind.

‘We are going to add to your duties this afternoon, Will. You have been doing exceptionally well these past few days, and I find there is… more I would like you to be responsible for.’

‘What, here, in your inner sanctum?’ He tossed the words back over his shoulder as he made his way into the room. ‘You’re going to trust me with something more dear to you than your plants?’

Hannibal merely smiled back.

‘More than you know. I would like to entrust you with looking after certain elements of my person. Please, sit.’

Will slowly eased himself into one of the two armchairs that faced each other in front of Hannibal’s desk. The ones reserved for patients. As Hannibal retrieved something from the armoire in the corner, he was left to mull over that statement, his heart beating harder.

His person?

Will felt his eyes widen as Hannibal walked briskly back towards him carrying two pairs of leather loafers. One brown. The other black.

‘Beginning with polishing my shoes.’

He placed them down in front of Will and settled back into the chair opposite him, still with that hint of a smile, eyes intent on his face, gauging his reaction closely.

No fucking way.

‘Are you serious?’

‘I am always serious, Will.’

‘No you’re not. You’re playing with me like I’m one of your patients. Don’t forget, I type your notes, *Doctor Lecter*.’

‘I was under the impression that perhaps you enjoyed a bit of sport, Will.’

Hannibal cocked an eyebrow at the old scabs still fading on the backs of Will’s knuckles, then sat back with a knowing smile.

Will's stomach flipped. Hard.

Trying to ignore that surprising kick of arousal, Will sat back in his chair, eyes narrowing, mirroring Hannibal's posture. He did his best to hide an incredulous smile, but left his hands on full display.

It was a brilliant redirection, he had to admit it.

I know exactly what you're trying to do.

Still... he decided to let him get away with it anyway.

Will let loose the rueful smile that quirked at his lip.

'A few bloody knuckles are hardly evidence of good sportsmanship, Doctor Lecter. And besides, I thought this was work, not play.'

It certainly felt like play. Hannibal said nothing, but his eyes were sparking back at him with an almost imperceptible smile of his own.

Apparently I'm not the only one who thinks so.

'So... you're telling me to sit here in front of you and shine your shoes? I'm surprised they're not still on your feet while I do it.'

'I had considered it.'

Will couldn't help the snort of a laugh that escaped him, surprising himself. This entire exchange had him completely off balance, and for once, he was actually enjoying it.

What is happening here?

'Really… *Doctor*... I thought you weren't interested in mocking me. Am I really meant to take this as a reward for good behaviour?'

Will expected another quick retort, but instead he was thrown completely off balance yet again as Hannibal's face softened, his smile losing some of its cunning, his eyes filling with a genuine warmth.

'Woe betide the man who would mock you, Will Graham. No, you are meant to take this exactly as I mean it. Sincerely. I wish for you to attend to me more… *personally*, and I am only in the habit of asking once. We will start with the shoes.'

'Like we started with the red pen?'

'Precisely.'

They stared each other down... but Will knew he would do it. It seemed like every day, Hannibal found new ways to push him, testing his willingness, his limits, his soft spots. He was learning what made Will tick, but also what made him soft, all the while increasing his appetite for that quiet command and the praise that hopefully followed.

It was like Hannibal knew just when to push him, but also exactly how to push him just a little too far, as if it pleased him just as much when Will bucked before submitting.

And just how much will you have to buck before you find out what comes after the red pen?

That was the question that sent the biggest thrill up his spine. But it was one he didn't dare let take root.

Don't mistake a little flirtation for more than it is… for more than it can be. He's still your boss and you're not throwing punches in a bar. What comes after the red pen is probably just... getting fired.

'Fine then, Doctor Lecter… If that's what you want. Where is the shoe polish?'

Hannibal stood and strode right up to him, forcing him back in his chair as he loomed above, crowding between his knees. Will gripped the arms as if that could ground him as Hannibal bent down into his space and spoke, low and hot in his ear.

'Moving forward, Will. This is not a negotiation. When I ask for something, I expect you to do it.'

Will's mouth opened and closed on useless syllables as he tried to get ahold of himself. Finally he managed to look up and spit something out...

'Well then, yes, *Sir*.'

It was meant in jest, just part of the game, but as the word fell from his lips, the room felt like it contracted around them. Their eyes caught and held, and Will heard Hannibal suck in his breath, mirroring his own.

'Good, Will. Very good.'

Nothing else was said. Will simply sat and polished the shoes and Hannibal watched him.

And, gods help him, he actually found himself enjoying it.

Just like the typing, and the pencil sharpening, and the plants, and the coffee… Will let himself sink into the task, allowing it to wash over him with each circle rubbed into supple leather, Hannibal's eyes on him like a warm hand on his shoulder. Quiet. Comfortable. Calm.

By the time Ms Komeda showed up, the shoes shone with a rich luster. Will watched as Hannibal traded the newly-polished black shoes for the ones he had been wearing, approval shining in his eyes.

And Will took pride in it.

Just as he had been told.

This is his design.

Still, he didn't hesitate to swipe a red pen off of Hannibal's desk on his way out.

So... what comes next, Doctor Lecter?

Chapter 3

‘Do you know how to tie a double Windsor, Will?’

Will paused in the doorway, coffee tray in hand. A moment’s confusion as he registered the empty desk, Hannibal’s suit jacket draped over the back of his chair (*checked grey and red - he’s in a whimsical mood*). Then his employer strolled out of the washroom and all the air left Will’s lungs.

Collar up, top button unfastened, vest hanging loose. *He looks so… accessible*.

‘Will, I asked you a question.’

He flicked his eyes up to Hannibal’s face, conscious of his slightly heated cheeks.

‘Sorry… well… yes, but it’s been a while.’

‘Show me.’

Will shot him a wry smile, bemused.

‘You want me to show you how to tie a tie?’

‘I want you to show me how *you* tie a tie.’ A hint of steel beneath the velvet.

The opportunity for closeness and touch was surprisingly tempting. Things he had denied himself - shied away from - for a long time, unwilling to risk rejection on the other person’s part or overindulgence on his. But this was different. This was Hannibal.

Controlled closeness. Measured touch. Disciplined indulgence. But does he want the same from me?

He placed the coffee tray on the desk and walked over to Hannibal, uncertainty goading him into one final jab.

‘Your coffee will get cold.’

‘Then you will make another.’

The conflicting flare of annoyance and arousal must have shown on his face. Hannibal caught it, of course. A snap of a smile.

‘Is there a problem, Will?’

The urge to appease versus the urge to tease.

‘Not at all.’ *Appeasement it is. This time.* ‘It’s just that I’m sure you wouldn’t want me to throw off the morning’s schedule.’

‘That’s very thoughtful of you, Will.’ It was practically a purr. ‘But I have faith in your ability to multitask.’

Yeah well, I'm willing to bet you've never used that fucking coffee machine while trying to do something else.

Always the urge for fight or flight. *But at some point it's just exhausting. Quit stalling. Let go. You already know how good it feels.*

'Really?' A quick intake of breath, walking closer. 'I mean, thank you.''

'Come then.' Stern expression tempered now by amusement. 'Show me.'

Will had faced some tough situations in his tenure with the FBI, but none had prepared him for standing almost toe-to-toe with Hannibal Lecter. He fixed his eyes on the tie, red flowers on grey silk. Tried not to notice the slip of skin in the v of the doctor's throat, the suggestion of chest hair beneath crisp cotton. Tried not to allow dark, rich notes of subtle cologne to fill his senses.

He cleared his throat. 'Right.'

I'm his reflection. His mirror.

First fixing the length so that the tapered end sat higher, he flicked his eyes up.

'Very good, Will. The narrowed end should be no lower than the top of the ribcage.' A warm hand placed atop his and the adjustment made. 'Like so.'

Trying to ignore the rapid drumming of his heart, Will could only nod.

Was it his imagination or did Hannibal's hand press against his for just a moment before it was lifted away?

Focus. Wide over narrow and…

'No, Will. Like this.'

And the hand was back, cupping his, guiding him lower.

'Cross over at the second shirt button. That's right. Now secure it with your left hand.'

Will glanced up.

He tried to keep his voice even, but a huskiness had crept in, betraying him. 'Could you just... lift your chin for me?'

For me. Such simple words but they sent a tingle of possessiveness through him. *Mine. To serve? To please? Taking control by giving.*

The idea was… oddly freeing.

Hannibal tilted up his chin obediently. Will swallowed.

Just tie the damn tie. Under, up and through; across, up and under.

Careful not to contact skin, afraid of how badly he would blush if he did. He stopped and studied the partially completed knot.

‘What are you looking for, Will?’

He could feel the vibrations of that low timbre through his fingers, the whisper of breath against his forehead.

‘Checking that it isn’t too loose.’ He frowned. ‘How does it feel?’

‘You’re doing very well.’

It’s still not right.

‘But if you put your index finger here,’ Hannibal’s own fingers trailed softly across Will’s to reposition them, ‘it will give you added control.’

And you know all about that, don’t you?

Will tried to focus on his fingers doing the work. Pausing, he took a few moments to check the width of the knot, then slid it carefully up until the backs of his fingers brushed the smooth, taut skin of Hannibal’s throat.

Freshly shaven. Still slightly damp. From the shower...

With the utmost care, he flipped down the collar. Starched, of course. Fingers grazing skin. *Fuck.* He’d forgotten how much *touching* would be involved; it seemed a lifetime ago since the de rigueur of shirts and ties in the classroom at Quantico.

But Hannibal does this every day…

Teeth gritted, he fastened the top button then repositioned the knot to sit square.The final touch, looping the narrow end through the back.

He smoothed his fingers down the length of the tie, cool silk and patterned ridges pleasant to the touch. And beneath, warm muscle.

I want… I want...

Releasing his breath in a shaky exhale, Will stepped back, hands falling away.

‘All done.’

An unexpected silence. Unnerved, he looked up and noticed with interest the faintest slash of colour on Hannibal’s cheekbones.

Well, well. I guess I’m not the only one thrown off balance. Don’t tell me that your test backfired, Doctor.

But Hannibal was already turning away, buttoning his vest, reaching for his jacket.

We both have our armour.

‘Thank you, Will.’

‘Thank *you*... Sir.’

A raised eyebrow. A shared smile.

It doesn't feel so strange anymore.

Will picked up the mug. Lukewarm.

'I'll go and make fresh.'

And the day resumed its usual course.

Such comfort in the familiar.

Such comfort in… him.

****

Days now since the tie, that *closeness* in the office. Almost a week of being kept just out of reach. Not a single request that would require Will's prolonged presence in the inner sanctum.

Despite the open door between them (*the tether that keeps pulling me to him. Him to me?*), Hannibal had been frustratingly preoccupied. And today seemed annoyingly likely to follow the same pattern. Even when Will had served the morning coffee and freshly sharpened pencils, he'd gotten no more than a murmured 'thank you' before a broad back had signalled his dismissal. Oddly irritated by the lack of attention, he'd worked through lunch. (*He doesn't like it when I don't stop to eat. So I won't stop to eat.*)

Nothing. Zero reaction. Nose still in that damn notebook. After another three hours of *fuck all*, Will had sat at his desk entertaining himself with ideas of how he could break Hannibal's resolve. Turn on the radio? Do cartwheels across the floor? Close the door?

Cut the tether?

Okay, that might be a step too far.

So that had been that. Resignation and resolve. Until this last-minute reprieve.

Will did his best to walk slowly into the office. Hannibal didn't look up.

'Have you copied the notes on Mr Froideveaux?'

'Almost.' Resisting the urge to knock something off his desk. *Oh, come on. Give me something!*

'Then get them finished, and have them couriered over to Doctor Du Maurier's office before you go.'

Will dawdled, scowled; glared at the dark head still resolutely bent, slicked back hair gleaming tawny under the lights. Finally sloped back to his desk with no small amount of irritation. With Hannibal. With himself.

You're not a spurned lover. Get it together!

He sat back in his chair, arms folded, brooding at the infernal typewriter. Told himself it didn't matter. Hannibal wasn't paying him any attention anyway.

Except that he really is and you know it.

Clack clackety clack.

He punched the keys with unnecessary vigour.

What a shit day. And now this.

Doctor Du Maurier.

He had spoken with her twice on the phone, met her once, and at each encounter her aristocratic air had set his teeth on edge. That and the way she looked at Hannibal, all fucking proprietary. The worst of it was the way in which she enunciated his name, always drawing it out with possessive relish.

'Tell Haannibal I will consider his referral.' 'Ask Haannibal whether eight o'clock would suit for the breakfast meeting.'

As far as Will was aware, they were colleagues and friends. As far as he was aware.

And since when is that your business?

Job finally done, he contemplated calling it a night, but Bedelia Du Maurier still soured his thoughts. He pulled out the scalpel, looking for relief in how it felt in his hand as he sharpened a new batch of drawing pencils. A small rebellion, to do this now instead of in the morning, but still satisfying. And as the blade sliced through pliable wood, he found himself fantasising about applying its point to her skinny neck.

'Your technique is improving.'

The smooth, deep tones close to his ear caused his breath to hitch.

'Jesus, Ha- Doctor.'

Embarrassed by the near-slip, he whipped round and snapped, 'You might want to avoid startling the guy with the scalpel in his hand.'

A slow blink was the only reaction to his snippiness (*rudeness - that was rude, Will*), though the long pause that followed was ominous. And he much preferred rich honey to slate grey in Hannibal's eyes.

Flushing, he turned back to his task. Tried to parse his feelings: pleasure at having *finally* drawn Hannibal out (*I'm still a good fisherman*), censure for having displeased him in the first place.

'You seem a trifle flustered, Will. Do you not like being left to your own devices?'

'Do I…'

Registered the knowing smile on the doctor's face. And suddenly everything clicked into place.

He knows *how much I want this. He knew it before* I *did. He wants me to know how much I'm craving every second of attention, direction, command. This was a lesson.*

Strange, the simultaneous urge to laugh and hurl things around.

Hannibal was directly behind him now, and Will froze as a puff of breath against his neck was followed by a swift but unmistakable inhale.

First of all, oh god. Secondly...

'Did you just *smell* me?'

'Difficult to avoid.'

A note of humour had crept into Hannibal's voice. Somehow, that made it worse. And then he compounded it.

'Do your dogs have access to your closet, by any chance?'

'Of course not.' Grinding his teeth, Will resolved not to rise to the bait. 'They were restless this morning - probably smelled a coyote. They were all over me and I didn't have time to change.'

Oh, for fuck's sake.

'No matter. It's an easy fix.'

Will frowned, fretted, swivelled around. 'What does that -'

But he was talking to the air.

Damn it! What is he, smoke?

****

Next morning, Will woke up still brooding on that last exchange. To his surprise he found himself rooting around for the iron. Salmon shirt, best pants, a bit of product to tame his curls. The minimum of dog hair. Refusing to analyse his actions while darting himself knowing looks in the bathroom mirror.

Just admit it. You like pleasing him. A nourishing feedback loop. Amuse-bouche.

But this time it was, apparently, too little too late.

He threw his keys onto his desk, staring daggers at the suit bag draped over his chair, then scooped it up and stalked off in search of his infuriating boss.

'Good morning, Will. That… doesn't look like my coffee.'

Brandishing the bag, Will endeavoured to keep his tone even.

‘Please tell me this is your dry cleaning.’

Hannibal rose slowly from behind his desk.

‘Try it on.’

‘No.’

‘Use my washroom.’

‘No.’

Hannibal pushed his hands into his pants pockets, rocked back a little on his heels, eyes narrowing in time with a dangerous, spreading smile.

‘Now, Will.’

Like a punch in the gut.

Shit.

****

He had to admit, it felt good.

Rust-coloured silk sensuous against his skin. Black paisley tie and charcoal tailored suit with a pocket square to match the shirt. Deftly, he knotted the double Windsor, remembering to incorporate Hannibal’s instruction.

Was this what that was about?

The idea made him blush, pleased. For a few moments after, he swivelled in front of the floor-to-ceiling mirror, pushed back his hair with hands that trembled slightly.

Not entirely terrible.

He finally stepped back out. Realised that he hadn’t locked the door. Hadn’t had to.

Because I trust him? Maybe I do...

‘Well? Better?’

He sought Hannibal’s gaze; the approval shining there set his heart beating faster.

‘Beautiful. The fit though… is only adequate. It would have been better had I sent you to my tailor for proper measuring.’

‘So why didn’t you?’

Will didn't know which of them was more surprised by the question.

Hannibal took a step forward. 'Would you have gone?'

Mouth suddenly dry, Will shrugged. 'Perhaps.'

'I shall bear that in mind.'

He's letting the shrug pass. He must *be pleased.*

'I'll go make the coffee.' A wry apology in his smile.

'One moment, Will.'

Another step and Hannibal was right in front of him.

Is he going to touch me? Eagerness at the thought.

'Allow me.' Fingers gentle, Hannibal adjusted the angle of the knot, the lay of the tie. 'There. Perfect.'

I feel like I'm glowing. Like his damn orchids. For him. Because of him. Fed, nurtured, cultivated. All a part of his design.

A warm look passed between them. And the day's routine resumed its flow.

Except it feels like something has shifted...

Strange how assertive he sounded to his own ears when he answered a call, how he naturally sat up straighter in his chair, how he moved around the outer office with a new confidence. A confidence he'd thought he had lost.

What a difference a suit makes. What a difference he *makes.*

'Oh, Will.' Strolling into the room mid-morning, Hannibal started picking through the mail that Will was in the midst of sorting.

Can't keep away, huh?

'Yes, Doctor?'

Smugness made him borderline flirtatious, and it earned him a brief smile.

'Book a luncheon reservation for two at the Four Seasons.'

Will glanced up, startled, heart suddenly racing.

Hence the suit?

'Of course. For what time?' Couldn't help anticipating.

Hannibal hummed. 'Best make it one o'clock. Doctor Du Maurier is meeting me here and we will drive over together.'

A sharp twist of jealousy. Surprisingly disappointed.

‘And I will not be returning this afternoon, so you may have the rest of the day off.’

To do what? He resisted the urge to wrench loose his tie, trying to repress a sardonic scowl.

I’m all dressed up with nowhere to go.

And where was *Haaaaannibal* going after his cosy lunch for two? Will rechecked the schedule but it held no surprises. No more appointments.

You need to stop. He doesn’t owe you anything, and the man just bought you a suit. What was that about though, if not lunch? A leveling of the playing field? An elevation?

He knew there would be a reason. Had to be. For all of it. Hannibal never did anything without a reason, and most of those reasons were lessons.

And he had to admit,the suit was beautiful. Hand-picked with infinite care.

He thought of me the whole time. And when I put it on, I felt good. And he liked what he saw. Liked it a lot.

There it is.

****

Thoughts that sustained him through the rest of the morning; allowing him to greet Bedelia Du Maurier with a just-this-side-of-polite who-gives-a-shit attitude when she arrived at twelve forty-five precisely, finger pressing on the buzzer just long enough to send Will a clear ‘I’m a VIP so jump to it’ message. He sighed, shuffled a stack of typing paper, set it back neatly on the desk, repeated the process, then pushed the built-in lock release to open the front door. Thought he heard a quiet chuckle from the main office, but didn’t look round in case it had been wishful thinking.

A different kind of clack clack as Manolos hit tile.

Then in she wafted. *Suit by Prada, hair by Laboratorie, nose by Matarasso. Or so says Susie Swanson of the Baltimore Sun.*

‘I’m here to see (*don’t fucking say it*) Haannibal.’

She extracted a gold compact from her purse and inspected herself, satisfaction evident in the lift of her chin, the fluffing of her hair.

‘Please tell him that I’ve arrived.’

The interconnecting door was still wide open.

She has to be able to see him from where she’s posing. But that’s the whole point, right? You’re the help. You’re expected to bring the prize to her.

Will decided to play along and, maybe, play up. Just a little. Just because.

‘Take a seat, Doctor Du Maurier.’

She eyed the twin Hepplewhites as if they were straight out of the dumpster round the back.

‘That won’t be necessary,’ she announced breathily. ‘We have a luncheon in fifteen minutes. He won’t want to be late.’

The subtle reminder that she knew Hannibal better than Will did. It set his foot tapping on the floor. He leaned back in his chair, far too idly for a mere employee; swivelled around, just a touch, just enough to hopefully set her teeth on edge.

‘Doctor Lecter is currently occupied. If you will take a seat, I will let him know that you’re here.’

Her forehead furrowed and immediately she cleared it. She tucked away the compact and hesitated. Pale blue eyes shifted past Will to the open doorway. But evidently she was still not willing to be the first to cry uncle.

‘Of course.’

She set herself gracefully into the nearest chair. It was a pretty picture: grey silk reclining against red leather. The heart-shaped carved back added a whiff of romance. Will had never hated her more.

There was still no movement from Hannibal’s office. Will was desperate to turn around and get the lay of things, but the fact that Hannibal hadn’t yet stormed out to apologise for Will’s rudeness was telling. So he picked a sheaf of notes from the in-tray, selected a fresh sheet of typing paper (*oyster, 135gsm, milled to a luxurious softly textured surface - I know what you like, Doctor*) and inserted it into the dread machine.

Doctor Du Maurier’s brows rose.

Will started to type.

She cleared her throat.

‘Excuse me.’

Not a chance.

He typed faster.

‘I really must insist.’

And yet…

Faster. Keys punched so hard, he knew he was taking a risk here. But he couldn’t stop. Couldn’t help himself. *She’s everywhere. Her voice, her face, her goddamn perfume.* Will thought of the *luncheon* to come and bit his lip so hard, he tasted copper.

‘Oh, this really is unconscionable.’ She stood up, face tight with anger. ‘I'll go in myself.’

Because shouting would be unspeakably vulgar...

Will was out of his seat and round the desk before she had taken three steps.

‘You can’t do that.’

‘Get out of my way.’ She was really seething now.

But so was Will.

‘Now, now, Doctor Du Maurier. Manners. You really should be more gracious when speaking to the help.’

‘You righteous, reckless, twitchy little man.’ She peered over his shoulder. ‘Haannibal?’

‘Sit down,’ Will gritted.

Her response was a scornful eye roll. ‘I think not. In fact, I’m leaving.’

Will’s hand was temptingly close to the scalpel. ‘What a very good idea.’

And then Hannibal walked through from his office. ‘My apologies, Bedelia. I was just freshening up.’

Liar. You were enjoying the show…

Breathing rapidly, cheeks hot, Will shot him a narrow-eyed glare - and found that Hannibal was looking down with a great deal of interest. Because somehow Will had picked up the scalpel without noticing.

Fuck.

He uncurled his fingers, hastily pushing the incriminating object onto the pile of paper, which masked the clatter. Hannibal’s eyes slowly tracked upwards and their gazes caught.

‘You need a new secretary.’ Every syllable dripped cold venom. ‘One who knows their place.’

‘I’m sure Will was only doing what he thought would please me.’

The deep purr of his voice was mesmerising. Impossible to look away. And just like that, Bedelia Du Maurier ceased to be of any importance. Hannibal’s eyes flicked to Will’s lips and Will suppressed a shiver.

‘But of course it is unacceptable that you were kept waiting. Will, if you wouldn’t mind, a word please.’

Leaving Bedelia huffing in the outer office, Will followed Hannibal back into his, and winced as the doctor closed the door behind them. He turned on Hannibal, about to launch into an explanation, but the wind was knocked from his righteous sails when, instead of reprimanding him, Hannibal stepped closer and brushed a thumb across his bottom lip.

‘What happened here?’

‘I just - nothing. I - I bit my lip.’

‘I see.’ Hannibal regarded him steadily. ‘And the scalpel? Tell me what you were thinking.’

‘I don’t…’

Just bullshit... lie. Say something *that won’t get you fired.*

‘I don’t know.’

Genius.

Hannibal inspected his thumb, smeared with a trace of dark red. *Marked. By me.* Will flushed.

‘I’m sorry. I’ll fetch a cloth.’

‘No need.’

Without breaking eye contact, Hannibal brought his thumb to his lips and sucked slowly.

Almost like a kiss. God.

‘Do something for me, Will.’

Right now I feel like I’d do anything for you.

‘What would you like me to do... Sir?’

A smile so gentle, Will was utterly captivated.

‘It seems I’ll be returning this afternoon after all. I would like you to stay. Continue with your duties. And wait for me, should I be delayed.’

Wait? How long? For what?

Does it matter?

He’s coming back for you, *and you know it.*

Found himself saying, ‘Yes.’ But couldn’t resist pushing back, just a little.

‘You can *owe* me the afternoon off.’

****

The clock’s monotonous ticking dragged across his nerve endings as it spitefully checked off the seconds, minutes and hours of Hannibal’s absence.

Five forty-five. Tapping his pen against the desk.

Why am I still here?

Six o'clock. The dogs would be expecting dinner in another hour.

Six-fifteen. Pacing, eyeing his coat and the suit bag hung alongside it on the coat stand.

How far am I prepared to go with this? How far would he expect me to?

And then the door opened and Hannibal walked in, bottle of wine in hand, hair glistening with beads of rain.

'Still here, Mr Graham.'

'You asked me to wait.'

Flushing, defensive, ready to walk out at the first sign of smugness. But Hannibal's expression was genuinely apologetic.

'I stopped off at home to pick up the wine and got caught in rush hour traffic.' A pause. 'It pleases me very much that you waited, Will.' He held up the bottle. 'I hope you like red.' A flash of a smile. 'It's a nice Chianti.'

Not another test. Traffic. The thought was unaccountably amusing. And comforting.

He wasn't playing you. He went back to his house for the wine. To share with you.

Will wanted to see the smile again. Suddenly eager to *earn* it.

'I've completed all the referrals for this month.' Trailed his hand over the pile. 'Would you like to see them?'

'Put them in my briefcase. I'll look them over this weekend. You've done well to finish them so quickly.' A caress in his voice. 'Assuming, of course, that you didn't rush to do so. I'm not a fan of sloppy work.'

The implication stung. 'Really? Yet you seem to so *enjoy* wielding your red pen.'

Hannibal looked back at him impassively.

Stop butting heads with him. Why do you have to keep doing that?

Will spread his hands. 'I'm sorry. I - I don't take criticism well. I didn't rush the referrals.'

A beat, then a gracious nod.

'Apology accepted. And for future reference, my criticism is only ever constructive, Will.'

'Noted.' *No, that's not enough.* 'You've never been anything but fair with me.'

'I'm glad to hear it.' And the smile was back. 'Come through to my office. The wine needs to breathe and we can talk there in more comfort.'

Talk about what?

But he followed, watching with interest as the doctor went over to an antique dresser and retrieved a squat candle, a small square of muslin and a box of matches. He placed them on his desk.

‘Go to the kitchen and fetch the bottle opener and decanter please, Will.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘And two glasses.’

A secret thrill at that.

‘Which ones?’

Hannibal paused in the act of unbuttoning his coat, head tilted in consideration.

‘The Baccarat, I think.’

Okay, am I meant to know what that means?

‘The soup bowls on stalks or the ones that look like chalices?’

Ever gratifying, to draw from Hannibal a genuine chuckle.

‘The chalices, if you please. Have you ever decanted wine, Will?’

‘Definitely not.’

‘Then that is where we shall begin.’

****

There was something Zen-like about being taken through the steps. Lights dimmed, a rainbow of colour in the background from the gentle cascade of water from the orchid sprinkler. Instructions fed to him quietly, the low rumble of Hannibal’s voice ever pleasing. Centring.

‘Always wipe the neck of the bottle after opening... Light the match, but away from the wine. The smoke can impair the flavour… Pour at a forty-five degree angle and watch for sediment.’

‘Ah, hence the candle.’

‘Exactly. The light source will betray any shifting.’

Hannibal at his shoulder. Reassuring, not oppressing. Guiding, not dictating. A communion of sorts between them.

When Hannibal served the wine, it felt odd to be on the receiving end. Like an ill-fitting suit. Will’s discomfort must have shown, for Hannibal offered a gentle smile.

‘Tonight you are my guest, Will. Please, take a seat.’

It didn’t escape Will’s notice that these were the chairs Hannibal used for his clients' sessions, but he let it pass. Black leather, butter-soft. Definitely more comfortable than the antique chairs or the Queen Anne sofa. He followed Hannibal’s example, thumbing open his jacket as he sat down to avoid creasing the fine material, aware that the gesture had been noted. Just the teeniest bit smug that he had thought to do it.

It pleases me to please him.

‘I would normally allow the wine to aerate for thirty minutes before pouring, so this will not be quite at its best.’ Pinching his glass at the base, Hannibal swilled the rich liquid around the bowl and put his nose to the rim, inhaling, before taking a sip. ‘Satisfactory.’

Will was half afraid that he would be subjected to an interrogation about how the wine smelled and tasted. *The perfect opportunity for me to make a complete ass of myself.* But instead, to his relief, he was left to enjoy it as he chose. The relief was short-lived.

‘Tell me about this afternoon.’

Settling back in his chair, one leg crossed over the other, Hannibal looked every inch the indolent inquisitor. Eyes half-lidded, yet ever-watchful.

Will circled the rim of his glass with his forefinger.

‘What would you like to know?’

‘Firstly, how did you come to bite your lip?’

Shifting in his chair. ‘A lot of people bite their lips.’

‘Not to the point of drawing blood.' A cant of the head. 'How were you feeling at the time?’

Is this a therapy session? Disappointment soured the wine on his palate.

‘Am I your patient now, Doctor?’ An acid drawl.

‘Not at all.’

‘Then what is this?’ A sweeping gesture to take in the room, the wine, his suit.

‘This is whatever you need it to be.’ Unblinking calm.

That gave him pause. Not what he wanted but what he *needed*. It made him feel oddly…

Cherished.

And somewhere deep inside, a fort wall crumbled.

‘I felt… beseiged.’ Jealous too, but he would leave out *that* particular detail.

‘An interesting choice of words. Beseiged by Doctor du Maurier?’

‘You’ve spent plenty of time with her. What do *you* think? She has this incredibly annoying habit of treating employees like 19th century lackeys.’ A snap that he couldn’t control.

It felt good to express at least *some* of his anger - anger that he was beginning to realise had been building slowly all evening, like poison beneath his skin. But what if the cost was his job?

‘I’m sorry, that was rude.’

‘Yes, it was.’ But Hannibal sounded more thoughtful than anything else.

‘How does that make *you* feel, Doctor?’ A slight challenge in the question, though he moderated his tone.

Hannibal placed his wine glass on the side table and leaned forward, clasping his hands between his knees and regarding Will almost with curiosity. ‘Intrigued.’

‘By my rudeness?’

‘By my tolerance of it.’

Will put aside his own glass and leaned forward in turn. ‘You abhor rudeness above all things.’

‘Yes.’

‘So why make an exception for me?’

Hannibal’s lips quirked. ‘I believe it’s *your* turn now. Quid pro quo, Will.’

‘Oh, a *trade*.’

‘It seems only fair. After all, this is just a conversation, not therapy.’

An exchange of smiles. *I’m really* enjoying *this. Enjoying* him...

‘Go ahead, Doctor.’

Buoyed up by the attention, relishing the delicious push-and-pull of two minds equally matched.

‘What were you intending to do with the scalpel?’

Okay, not enjoying it so much any more. He dropped his gaze.

‘It was just - I don’t know - there.’

‘In your hand?’

‘On the desk. Just a - a thing to play with, like a pen. I fidget a lot.’

Bullshit. But what else can he say? *I was having fantasies about stabbing your obnoxious colleague in the neck?*

Hannibal’s eyes narrowed, and when he spoke it was with an intensity that captured Will utterly.

‘Tell me, Will. When the shadows beckon and demons whisper to you of the terrible things you have witnessed - of the lives you failed to save, or saved at a cost - how do you silence them?’

Heart thudding, palms suddenly moist, Will took a shuddering breath. ‘You know, *don’t* you?’

He forced himself to meet Hannibal's gaze, but there was no sign of the condemnation he feared. The psychiatrist's mask was in place.

'Do you go to a gym or your local bar?'

A hard swallow. 'I go to the worst bars I can find.'

'I see. And when you win -'

'I don't win. I never win.'

A trace of compassion, but no pity. 'Because winning is not the goal.'

'No.'

'What you seek is relief in violence, control in release.'

Will squeezed his eyes shut, ran shaking hands through his hair, nodded.

'Look at me, Will.'

Impossible to ignore the silky command. Helpless to the pull.

'You enjoy the pain because it frees you.'

'It…' He licked his lips. '...simplifies things.'

'No time for the whispers in your head when you have blood to stem and cuts to mend.'

'No.' Almost a whimper. *It hurts, how well he understands me.*

'But the method you have chosen is dangerous, Will. There can be no control in chaos.'

'I know. I haven't - done any of that since I started working here. And I don't intend to go back to it.'

Oddly, Hannibal looked less than pleased. 'Then you have left yourself with no outlet at all.'

A huff of frustration. 'What concerns you so much, Doctor Lecter?'

'What concerns me, Will, is that one day that scalpel will find its target.'

Will flinched. 'You believe I'm a danger to Doctor du Maurier?'

He wasn't sure what affronted him more - the implication that he was a murderer-in-waiting or the idea that Hannibal's main concern was for *her*.

'I'm not speaking of Doctor du Maurier.' The softness was back, tempered now by steel. 'Promise me something, Will.'

The temptation to say *'Anything'* was scary. 'What?'

'When the shadows gather again - when you need a way out of dark places - I want you to come to me.'

Feelings of relief, of gratitude, almost overwhelmed him. Yet doubt, ever his nemesis, pricked.

‘You really think you can quiet the voices?’

Hannibal smiled. ‘I think we can quiet them together.’

A revelation.

I seek control in release. And you, Hannibal - you seek release in control.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That's right, who's in charge now?

Will's smile fell somewhere on the spectrum between smug and grateful as the coffee machine submitted with a gurgle. He'd finally mastered the temperamental thing, learning to coax it along more by feel than anything else.

At least something feels right this morning.

Smile faltering, Will tried to push the thought aside.

He'd had a bad night, and its bitter taste still lingered on his tongue.

He stood and left the coffee to do its thing, unable to keep his feet from wearing circles around the reception room as he waited.

If only you could master yourself as well as that damn coffee machine. But apparently your feet have decided to take their cue from your brain. Running in circles.

He was beginning to wonder just how many times he could pass the open office door before Hannibal noticed.

You know he already has.

Will did his best to resist the urge to wave.

Instead he sighed around a wry smile and forced himself to stop, yanking his tie tighter, the knot closing snug around his throat. It was... oddly comforting, like a firm hand on the back of his neck. He had to admit, getting dressed this morning *had* helped, the suit (the third one Hannibal had bought for him now) slipping on like a suit of armour, a barrier against the rawness of a night spent tossing and turning.

Not enough of a barrier, apparently. Maybe you should have just… let yourself go to the bar.

Will tried to push that thought aside as well, busying himself with minutiae instead, hoping the comfort of the morning routine might just be enough to settle him before going into Hannibal's office.

He checked the plants (again), set his desk to rights (if you could call moving a stapler a fraction of an inch an improvement), and rehung his coat from the hook by the door (for no discernable reason whatsoever other than the opportunity to to give it a brief but violent shake).

No reason except the desperate need to throttle something. Not like your coat is hitting back anytime soon though.

He couldn't help rolling his eyes at himself. He'd made the mistake of driving by one of *those* bars on his way home from work yesterday, only at the last second gripping the wheel and forcing

himself back on the road, watching as that particular brand of relief receded in his rearview.

As if that wasn't enough, Jack had the brilliant timing of calling him just as he'd gotten home. The dogs were still nosing around in greeting as he'd answered the phone.

You should really stop doing that. Is it possible to block every number that isn't Doctor Lecter's?

As expected, Jack had bulled something about 'just a friendly check in', but it hadn't taken him long to mention a case that was troubling him. Will had made the mistake of not flat-out refusing his request to send him some files. And then he'd made another by actually opening the email.

Eventually he'd crawled in bed with a head full of violence, that old familiar cocktail of need and guilt making him white-knuckle his thoughts just as surely as he had the steering wheel. He'd even gone as far as getting dressed and climbing back into his car, ready to try and make last call at the closest dive.

'When the shadows gather again - when you need a way out of dark places - I want you to come to me.'

Hannibal's words thrummed through him now as they had then, taunting and comforting him in equal measure. They had rattled around his head since they had been uttered almost a week ago, but he still wasn't sure exactly what to do with them. At least they'd been enough to get him out of the car and back in bed last night.

'I think we can quiet them together.'

Together.

Will was embarrassed to even admit to himself that it was that word more than any other that had echoed through his mind, crowding out the rest at least enough to finally allow him to fall into a semblance of fitful sleep.

He had left that night after their conversation with a head full of wine and a strange sense of… potential? Possibility? But since then, it had been business as usual. He'd found comfort in the daily routine, of course; in Hannibal's quiet but firm direction as they danced through the intricate steps of their day, but there had been no new 'tasks' set for him since then, no discernable 'lessons', almost as if Hannibal had taken a step back.

You probably scared him off. You did manage to basically brandish a scalpel at his closest colleague.

But the visceral memory of Hannibal raising his thumb to parted lips, no hesitation as he had licked clean the stain of Will's blood, eyes dancing… it did a better job of negating that idea than any Will could think of.

As if you've been thinking about much else for the past week. You know that's what sent you by the bar last night in the first place.

Yep, running in circles.

With no small relief, the coffee maker finally let out its satisfied wheeze and Will was able to focus on pouring the coffee.

Get your shit together. He's waiting for you.

A brief flare of frustration.

Let him wait. He's kept you *waiting long enough.*

Unfair and he knew it.

Waiting for what? What exactly are you expecting him to do?

Will didn't know the answer, and that frustrated him more than anything else.

Control in release, release in control.

The *potential* inherent in that palindrome of reciprocity had worked its way inside his mind somehow, flavouring his need with a kind of dangerous hopefulness, his runaway imagination leading him down an an increasingly decadent spiral of possibilities he feared could only lead to disappointment.

He couldn't possibly be thinking what you are, could he? Jesus, you can't even fully admit to yourself *what you're thinking.*

He tried to steady himself with a deep breath, but coffee sloshed over the rim of the mug as he picked up the tray, prompting a brief but immediate urge to throw it across the room. Instead he forced himself to set it down gently, leaning both hands on the counter and dropping his head between his arms, fists balled up tight enough to feel his fingernails bite against his palms.

'Something troubling you, Will?'

Will froze, still bent over the counter, looking at his feet through the cage of his arms.

Like a bloody ghost, I swear to god.

Before he could respond, a warm hand stroked up his spine, coming to rest lightly between his shoulder blades. It almost knocked the wind out of him. He kept his eyes on the ground, trying to catch his breath.

Jesus, I guess composing myself is out of the question.

'I'm fine.'

It was all he could manage, through gritted teeth. It was taking everything in him not to melt back against the comfort of Hannibal's palm, swallowing a small gasp as he felt a thumb sweep against his suit jacket, the nail scratching briefly against the fabric, sending an involuntary shiver through him.

'Of course you are. But I do believe my coffee may be under threat.'

Hannibal's voice was warm, amused. Will forced himself to stand, turning to extricate himself from the seductive spread of Hannibal's fingers. Except now he found himself face to face with smiling amber eyes, just a hint too close, searching his own with avid curiosity.

'Rough night perhaps?'

Not rough enough, apparently.

Will grunted his assent, unable to trust his voice.

It earned him a raised eyebrow, but he held his ground.

He's so close I can smell him.

As if he could hear his traitorous thoughts, Hannibal smiled and leaned even closer, forcing Will back slightly against the counter. Those honeyed eyes never left him, pinning him in place as Hannibal reached around him to pluck the mug from the tray. Taking a good long sip, Hannibal let his eyes drift closed, savouring the coffee, affording Will the rare opportunity to eye him unseen, watching as his throat, bared by an open collar, worked around a deep swallow.

He's waiting for you to put his tie on.

Looks like you won't be catching any kind of balance this morning.

'I asked you a question, Will.'

Hannibal's eyes were on him again, mild, curious, but his tone was firm. *The* tone.

Fuck.

But he just wasn't willing to concede so quickly, not this morning, not after white-knuckling a whole night because this man had suggested he give up the one comfort he knew, no matter how destructive it was. He felt another spike of anger, directed in no small part towards the hint of chest hair he could see in the V of open collar and how it was melting his insides.

'You also told me to bring you your coffee in the mornings, but here you are. I guess we're two for two in the *Will doesn't always do what he's told* department.'

The predatory smile that played over Hannibal's lips nearly knocked the wind out of him a second time.

But that's not really the only comfort you know anymore, is it? Not your only thrill...

'Show me your hands, Will.'

Hannibal threw a pointed look to the fists Will hadn't realized were still balled up at his sides.

'Why, so you can slap them?' The rash words were out before he could stop them, but Will heard his voice falter as his stomach flipped, hard.

'Is that what you want?'

Will almost choked on an incredulous bark of a laugh, floundering around another witty response that could possibly answer that question with anything other than *yes, please*. His hesitation was enough to spread that dangerous smile on Hannibal's face yet again.

'I won't ask you again, Will.'

Will could only answer by unclenching his hands; it took some effort, but he held them out for Hannibal to see, *that fucking tone* coiling in his gut.

Hannibal slipped his own hands in his pockets, and bent down close to Will's knuckles. But he didn't content himself with merely looking for cuts or bruises; he also took a deep, slow inhale, his face mere millimetres from Will's skin, the movement of air from his breath enough to raise every hair on Will's body.

If your hands shake any more, you're going to brush against his lips.

The memory of that tongue again, snaking out to gather his blood.

Cataloguing how I taste. How I smell.

Will felt like his head was spinning.

'Ha… Dr. Lecter…' He caught himself just in time, sucking in a breath. 'Listen, I didn't go to the bar.'

Apparently satisfied, Hannibal stood upright again, his tone when next he spoke noticeably lighter.

'I know. There is no smell of blood on your skin, and I have a feeling you would be less… agitated this morning if you had. For a time at least. Tell me, were you close?'

'Yes'

'Why?'

Need.

'Old boss. Sent me some… particularly graphic files.' A half-truth at least.

And you're *driving me just as crazy as those files did.*

'Guilt and desire can make puppets of the best of us, Will. There's a part of you that enjoys looking at those files, isn't there?'

Nope. You're not crawling that far in my head yet.

At least it wasn't phrased as a question. Will set his jaw, but Hannibal didn't push the issue.

'And what kept you from seeking out the relief of the bar?'

You. Or at least the potential of you.

'I don't know.'

Staring him down. He didn't want to give him any more. Not until he'd had a chance to cool down. Finally Hannibal inclined his head, a curl of a smile ghosting on his lips as he took another drink of coffee.

Letting it go. For now.

Do something. Change the subject. Do your job, for Christ's sake; it's not like you don't enjoy it.

‘So... where’s your tie? I don’t want to go three for three. Let me tie it for you.’

Now let’s see who’s on his back foot.

****

Will methodically polished Hannibal’s shoes as the late afternoon sun streamed in the front windows, transforming the office into a quiet cathedral. He could feel Hannibal’s eyes on him like a comforting weight.

He knew I needed this.

A window of calm. A bit of air before the night closes in again.

And Will knew the night was coming. Some of the agitation that had clung to him throughout the morning had evaporated over the day as he sought refuge in his duties, but still he could feel that same… itching… at the back of his mind, clawing at him, just waiting until he found himself alone.

But you’re not alone now.

Will could feel Hannibal looking at him from the chair opposite, a solid, comforting presence, watching as Will rubbed slow circles into the shoe’s leather. This had become a surprisingly relaxing routine for them; a few days a week, sandwiched between the last two patients of the day, before Will’s final batch of typing.

Sometimes they spoke. Sometimes they just sat quietly together.

But Hannibal always watched him.

Admit it. You miss it now… when his eyes aren’t on you.

‘Tell me, Will, does your old boss contact you often about case files?’

Will paused for a second at the question, mid-buff, but set back to work polishing in earnest, speaking into his hands as they busied themselves with the leather.

You knew he wouldn’t leave it for long. Just long enough for you to catch your breath.

‘Jack Crawford is nothing if not persistent. He’s not one to just forget about a tool he found that worked for him.’

Did you just call yourself a tool? Smooth.

‘I suspect it would be difficult for any boss to give you up easily.’

That made him pause again. He tried to make his voice jovial, teasing, but it came out quiet.

‘Already thinking about giving me up, are you?’

‘Quite the contrary, Will. I want you right where you are.’

Will felt his cheeks flush. Looked full into Hannibal's face. Searching.

He actually means it.

'Well, if my experience has taught me anything, it's that bosses can be persuasive when they want something.'

Hannibal stood up with a grin and shrugged off his suit jacket, walking to his desk to hang it neatly over the back of his chair. Will watched as he gathered his drawing supplies and returned with them to resume his seat, eyes intent on him.

Now a real warmth flushed through him.

You thought you were being dissected before.

'What I want right now is for you to just keep working.'

The sharp sounds of graphite on thick paper, a delicate counternote to the soft sound of Will's cloth on already shining leather.

'Funny, that's just what Jack used to say, or at least imply.'

Hannibal kept sketching as they spoke, eyes roving over him, almost possessive.

'Even when you were clearly in distress?'

'Particularly then. Although, when things got… intense… I tended to dig in deeper, all by myself.'

A rare admission, surprising himself more than Hannibal, whose pencil never stalled in its efforts.

To explore. To hunt and capture. What is he looking for?

'Distress can be an exciting emotion, Will. A thrill pursued in the hopes of catharsis. Human beings often seek to explore the edge of our endurance; to court our own limits, even unto our own destruction.'

You're telling me.

He resisted the urge to rub at the old bullet wound on his shoulder, the scars on his knuckles. Instead he rubbed harder at the toe of Hannibal's shoe.

'Addictive maybe?' His voice was quiet again, a little unsteady. A flash of memory. The smell of stale beer. Blood in his mouth. A heady but temporary relief. An itch he could never quite scratch.

He cast a look at Hannibal. He sat composed, continuing to draw, his tie a crimson exclamation, brazen against his white shirt. His eyes flicked continuously from Will's face to his page, but they were warm, approving. His pull was undeniable.

A new addiction maybe?

I swear, if you really knew what was in my head…

'Addiction is born of seeking whatever it is that gives us relief… pleasure.'

A knowing smile that reached his eyes.

Sometimes I swear you do.

‘But pursuing our desires need not be inherently destructive, or shameful, Will. Indeed, walking the knife edge of our own boundaries can be a form of elevation in itself.’

That was enough to coax a dry chuckle from him.

‘I’ve never been particularly good at ferreting out where my lines are. I’m not even sure whether I have too many, or not enough.’

‘All our lines are drawn in sand, Will, no matter how precisely. But they are our *own*, both to draw and to move, when and where we see fit.’

He threw an arch look Hannibal’s way but kept polishing.

‘That sounds like some shaky footing, Doctor.’

That smile again, dangerous, knowing, persuasive.

“Thrilling though, is it not?’

Will felt his stomach flip, hard.

‘Put down the shoes and take off your jacket.’

Will’s heart tripped in his chest, breath stalling as he looked up at Hannibal. His eyes were sharp, avid, hungry.

For me.

A surprising thrill of power. A suggestive smile of his own.

‘Does this fall under the purview of work, Doctor Lecter?’

‘One should always love what they do, Will.’

Shrewd but playful looks bounced between them as Will hovered on the edge of obedience.

Feeling along the knife edge.

You know you want to.

Will made a show of setting the shoes aside, finally standing to slowly shrug his jacket from his shoulders, never taking his eyes off Hannibal.

‘Put it over the back of the chair, please.’

He did as he was told.

Tell me more.

‘Undo your tie.’

Will's breath was coming faster now. He brought one finger to the knot, working it loose slowly, finally using both hands to drag the tail through, freeing himself. Undone, Will let the tie dangle around his collar. Still he held Hannibal's gaze, but something reckless was blooming inside him.

Before Hannibal could say anything more - before he could doubt himself - Will undid the top two buttons of his shirt, opening his collar.

Baring your throat?

That heady sense of power shot through him once again as he watched Hannibal's tongue snake briefly between his lips, spreading now in a slow smile, eyes inescapably drawn to the V of exposed flesh.

Quid pro quo, Doctor.

'Very good, Will.'

Slight hesitance. 'You don't mind?'

'I'm not opposed to a little… improvisation. Now sit.'

Will lowered himself slowly back in his chair. They eyed each other for a moment, playful, until finally Hannibal gathered up his pad and pencil and started sketching him once more. Will felt more on display than he ever had.

For him.

Heat spreading through him, Will shifted in his seat a little, adjusting, crossing his legs in a mirror of Hannibal's posture.

'Is this to be one of my new duties, then? Put on a new suit just so I can take it off again?'

A twitch of a smile, tugging on the tether.

'Beauty can be enjoyed both with and without embellishment.'

Beauty?

Will knew he was blushing, but he didn't try to hide it - didn't try to hide anything. Instead he felt something uncoil inside him, opening to that ravenous gaze, watching Hannibal as Hannibal watched him, a warm sense of pride growing inside him. Power.

Control in release.

Another lesson.

A sharp realization of how much he'd been craving this.

Whatever this is...

He could *feel* Hannibal's eyes as they traced across his face and chest and shoulders, visceral, like hands on his skin, stoking the tension between them as his pencil moved across the page.

Thrilling.

Will tried to hold his tongue but a kind of recklessness had gripped him, once again winning out over caution.

‘You say our lines are our own to move, *Doctor*... But what if sometimes we need a push? Someone to take hold and make us reach a little further in the sand?’

Someone in a plaid suit? Wielding a red pen, perhaps?

Hannibal’s pencil finally stilled. He looked up, but said nothing for a breath, two, three… his eyes openly roving over Will’s form; assessing, calculating, an almost private smile on his face. He sat back a little, putting his drawing aside, thoughtfully running a thumbnail down the razor sharp crease of his pants.

'You need help to draw your lines, Will?'

Will let out an exaggerated sigh, but cast a wry grin in Hannibal's direction, one hand scrubbing at his face.

'You don’t seem uncomfortable wielding that sort of power, *Doctor*.'

'There is a difference between power and authority. True power lies in understanding its essential reciprocity. It is always better to coax someone across a line rather than push them.’

‘I want you to come to me.’

Hannibal’s words echoed with stark immediacy, sending Will’s mind into a spin.

This… this holding pattern… that’s why it’s felt like he’s stepped back since our conversation. He won’t order you past this line, no matter how hard you push him. He will only take what you can give.

He may have set the stage, but you have to set the terms.

Hannibal smiled knowingly at him.

Doesn’t he know how hard that is?

‘We can only leap for those we trust, can’t we, Will. Every leap is one of faith.”

Of course he does.

Will struggled to find the words he needed, Hannibal’s expectant gaze cooling with each passing breath.

‘Stand up, Will’

Pulled by that velvet tone, Will stood on unsteady legs.

‘Turn around.’

A rumbling purr he could almost feel.

Will felt sure that Hannibal could hear his heart racing, beating at the bars of his ribcage. He heard slow measured steps; felt hot breath on the back of his neck. He forced himself to stand still - not lean against that solid weight, not tip his head back to rest on a strong shoulder…

Please.

But still… he couldn't say it… didn't know what to say…

The silence strung out between them and Will could feel the moment slipping away… felt the very instant Hannibal snapped the tether, a whisper of fabric and cool wool pressing at his fingertips…

No. No no no… wait...

But Hannibal was already sliding Will's suit jacket on over his arms, settling it expertly across his shoulders, impersonal hands brushing out the creases along the lines of his back. Will felt like he would lose his balance with each swipe.

'My four o'clock appointment is due, Will. Your afternoon notes are on my desk. The one on the top is for my publisher, so please take special care.'

Helpless, all Will could do was watch as Hannibal walked away from him, back around his desk, putting on his own jacket and settling himself down to wait for his client, that damned person suit already zipped up tight.

Just like that?

He couldn't tell if he was more angry with Hannibal or himself.

'Oh, and Will, make sure your tie is tied properly before you greet them.'

Goddammit.

Will shot Hannibal a withering look, but didn't say anything as he swiped the notes off the desk and let his feet carry him out the door, allowing it to slam behind him.

How clear a message is that, Doctor*?*

****

Will found himself banging away at his typewriter, drowning out the sound of murmured voices from the inner sanctum, uncaring if the noise reached Hannibal's ears.

Let him hear me.

He'd typed all of the notes except the letter to the publisher. Numerous times in fact. Fingers clumsy in his frustration, he'd found mistake after mistake after mistake.

Where's a red pen when you need one? Or am I going to have to ask for that *now too?*

He knew his anger wasn't exactly fair, but that didn't make him any less livid.

Anger makes you reckless. Maybe that's exactly what you need right now.

Maybe he knows that too.

Will pushed himself up from the desk with a grunt of frustration, unwilling to feel quite so charitable just yet, abandoning the notes to once again pace around the room… casting about for…

For what? Something retaliatory?

Walked over to the plants. Considered snipping one off at the base.

Leave it right in the middle of his desk. How clear is that?

But he just couldn't bring himself to do it.

It's not the plant's fault you couldn't admit what you want.

As if I even know what's on the table.

Will paused for a second, considering... found that he didn't really care anymore… whatever was on the other side of the line, he wanted it. All of it. Wanted it more than anything else in his life; the need to know almost as great as the need itself.

'Every leap is one of faith.'

More like a swan dive into the abyss. Hope there aren't any rocks at the bottom.

Will could hear the clock ticking, counting down the remaining minutes of Hannibal's last appointment, adding its own insistent imperative to his already visceral sensation of teetering over some kind of precipice.

The knife edge.

Will could feel the night drawing ever closer, that itch inside him mounting.

You can't just leave. Not tonight. You know exactly where you'll go.

'I want you to come to me.'

Hannibal's words echoed the same, but something new occurred to him.

He's couched your choice inside an explicit instruction. He's given you that much, at least.

Ordering you to own your line in the sand.

Will pulled himself up short. When had he picked up the scalpel? He turned it slowly between his fingers as he paced.

You're not at anyone's mercy except your own.

Unless you want to be.

At his mercy.

A slow smile spread over Will's face as he sat back down at his desk, setting the scalpel aside.

For now.

Will pulled out the notes for Hannibal's publisher and resumed typing.

This time, though, he had no interest in curbing his mistakes.

Let's see how well your red pen works on this, Doctor.

****

Will waited only a breath after hearing the back door close - Hannibal's patient leaving through the client's exit.

He took that moment to stare down at what lay before him on his desk.

A typed letter to Hannibal's publisher, on their thickest, most expensive paper. It sat on the silver tray meant to bring Hannibal his coffee in the morning.

Riddled with mistakes.

And a large, bloody thumbprint, right where Hannibal's signature ought to be.

Is that explicit enough for you, Doctor Lecter?

Will smiled; his thumb was still bleeding onto the edge of the tray as he picked it up and stalked into the office.

No more hesitation.

Will forced himself to enter quietly, projecting a calm that belied his racing heart. Hannibal sat at his desk, the very picture of cool collection, but sharp eyes followed Will's every measured step as he approached. The silver tray let out a faintly resonant ring as Will placed it on the desk, turning it *just so*, displaying the letter to its best advantage squarely in front of Hannibal.

Hannibal didn't look at it right away - he kept his gaze tight on Will, eyes shrewd, searching his face. Whatever he saw twitched a dark smile at the corner of his mouth. But as he finally looked down at the letter, really looked at it, Will felt his heart leap in his chest as Hannibal sucked in an audible breath.

Not so composed now, are we?

But Hannibal recovered quickly, sitting back in his chair to cross his legs elegantly at the knee, reaching languidly to pick up the letter so he could read it properly, expression entirely unreadable as he worked his way through it.

Will said nothing; merely leaned over him, invading his space to pluck a red pen from where it sat on the opposite side of the desk, handing it to him with a wry smile.

Clear enough?

Hannibal barely skipped a beat. If he was off balance, his voice didn't betray him… dark, rich, dripping with command.

'Stay where you are until I'm finished, Will.'

That tone thrummed through his body and mind like he'd been struck by a tuning fork. Still, Will managed to keep his voice even, pitched low as he responded through a suggestive smile of his own.

'Whatever you say. And you're right, a scalpel certainly does make precise cuts.'

Will slowly brought his thumb to his lips. Hannibal's sharp eyes followed his every movement with avid, predatory fascination, watching as Will sucked the blood from his thumb.

'Take your time, Doctor.'

Hannibal held his gaze a moment longer, then picked up the red pen and began circling. And circling. Will quickly lost track, but each mistake felt like a triumph, a brand new line in the sand, each a little further than the last.

When Hannibal got to the bloody thumbprint, Will heard him take a deep breath and licked his lower lip to temper a wry smile. Hannibal looked up at him, eyes locking as he marked it with a slow circle, large and extravagant.

Will's heart was pounding as Hannibal set the letter back down on the desk, facing away from him this time.

'Go stand in front of the desk, Will, and bend over.'

Will sucked in a breath. It caught in his throat.

Hannibal stood slowly to face him, so close they were almost touching, that looming presence enough to eclipse everything else. Sheer gravitational pull…

He spoke slowly, voice pitched low, a dark promise inherent in each enunciated word.

'Put your elbows on the desk, Will, and get your face very close to the letter.'

Hannibal's words, *that smile, that voice, that tone…* they reached inside him and twisted, propelling his legs forward to do as he was told.

Will hesitated for only a second more before bending over the desk.

He placed his hands and forearms flat on either side of the paper, nose mere inches from its surface, so close that he could feel his own breath against his face, hot and fast.

He could hear Hannibal's measured footsteps as he came around the desk to stand behind him. The seconds stretched out, tension singing, blood rushing in his ears. He couldn't help throwing a

glance back, only to see Hannibal, hands in his pockets, drinking in the sight of him, making him wait for whatever was coming next.

‘Eyes on the letter, Will. I won’t tell you again.’

Fuck.

Will was sure the anticipation would rip him apart.

‘How many typing mistakes have you made? Count them.’

Will shook his head a little, the red marks from the pen swimming in his vision as his eyes struggled to focus. He could feel himself beginning to sweat, the desk blessedly cool against his forearms. He counted as quickly as he could.

‘Tw… Twelve...’

A resounding *crack* as Hannibal’s palm connected with his ass so hard it pushed all the air from his lungs.

Oh god.

The world contracted. Will forgot himself and threw a stunned look over his shoulder.

Crack.

Will snapped his eyes back to the paper as his body was rocked against the desk with the force of the blow.

‘Count them, Will. One at a time. Out loud.’

Hannibal's voice was like iron, undeniable.

Perfect.

Will licked his lips and dragged in a long shaky breath, setting his feet a bit further apart for balance and resettling his forearms on either side of the letter.

'One.'

Crack.

'T… two'

Crack.

A great gulp of air.

'Three.'

Each blow came harder than the last, Hannibal's hand never striking the same place twice; unpredictable, first one cheek, then the other.

Will continued to call out the numbers, barely a fraction of a second passing before Hannibal's hand would connect. His voice sounded utterly alien in his own ears; sometimes loud, sometimes a whisper, but a thread of need wove through every gasping word.

Please, don't stop...

He was panting now and his ass felt like it was on fire, Hannibal's hand like a brand - a heat that scorched straight through him.

'Ten.'

Rounding in on the final mistakes, closer and closer to the wide crimson circle around the bloody thumbprint. He could barely see, the red all bleeding together, sweat dripping to further blur the edges of the ink, awash in a sea of sensation.

'Eleven!'

The slap caught him in the delicate crease where his ass met his thigh, wringing a low moan from him. It sounded… *decadent*, somehow, almost obscene. Will could feel himself getting hard, but it seemed far away, almost incidental, the impact of Hannibal's hand the only feeling he needed to chase right now. He forced his hips away from the desk, his ass further into the air.

'Twelve!'

This time the ringing *crack* almost shoved him over, but Hannibal didn't pause, another resounding slap to the other cheek enough to right his balance… and another, and another… following faster and faster now, no longer a need to count since reaching the bloody thumbprint.

The pain was enormous. The pleasure, obliterating.

Will could hear his own breathing, heavy and ragged… but he could hear Hannibal now as well, a deep growl resonating from behind him as his rhythm hit a fever pitch.

Will's mind was spinning with sensation, but it was also strangely *still*. The world had narrowed to just the two of them and Will felt something inside him *loosen* somehow, his vision going white, a low moan issuing from him that built louder and louder in time with Hannibal's punishing rhythm. His legs could barely hold him now, but he no longer fought to keep his balance, knowing Hannibal's hand would catch him.

That *he* would catch him.

Will felt himself *let go*.

Crack.

Crack!

CRACK.

Will cried out at the force of the final blow, Hannibal's momentum carrying him forward to slump over Will's back, one hand slamming down on the desk for balance so that their fingers overlapped, briefly gripping each other for purchase. A mutual grounding.

Relief like a wave.

All I've ever wanted.

Hannibal's breath was hot against his cheek, his body pressed full against him, pushing him down against the desk. But as Hannibal slowly drew himself back and away, Will couldn't help the small sound that escaped him - startlingly close to a whimper.

He didn't know what else to do, so he kept his forearms on the desk, trying to regain his breath as he watched Hannibal walk back around his desk, tugging at his vest and cuffs, running a hand through hair that had worked its way loose to spill over his forehead, setting himself to rights.

Slowly, Hannibal lowered himself into his chair until their eyes were level with each other - gazes locked, breathing still uneven. The slight blush on those high cheekbones filled Will with a heady sense of pride, triumph, power.

True power lies in understanding its reciprocity.

Hannibal's words snapped in place.

'Go and type it again, Will.' An ironclad tone, even now.

Will's gut rolled lazily.

'Yes, *Sir…'*

Hannibal's smile spread, approving, warm and rich and dark.

Sudden and overwhelming gratitude flushed through him, a growing sense of earnestness wiping the coy smile from Will's lips as the magnitude of what had passed between them hit him full on.

The relief - the...*potential* of it all - like a revelation.

He willed Hannibal to see it on his face, to *feel* it, to know what this meant to him… it made him want to leap again…

‘Thank you… Hannibal.’

Will could practically taste Hannibal’s name in his mouth, heavy and sweet on his tongue; dangerous, like honey straight from the hive. He liked the *feel* of it, the *sound* of it. It earned him a raised eyebrow, but the deepening colour on Hannibal’s cheeks sent another intoxicating rush of power through him.

He likes the sound of it on your lips just as much as you do.

‘Thank *you*, Will.’

Will’s heart was full as he turned away from warm amber eyes. His mind strangely quiet, satisfied, he no longer had any fear of the night as he strode quickly from the room, off to type the letter again.

To do as he was told.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 4 marks the end of the first part of Secretary.

Stay tuned for Chapter 5! Thanks for reading, Fannibals!

UPDATE: We've posted a little update on Tumblr <here. Part 2 is coming soon Fannibals, we promise!

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

> And finally, we're baaaaack! Welcome to Part 2 Fannibals!
>
> Thanks to everyone for your patience and thirsty words of encouragement as you waited on more of this fic! We're so happy to be back writing this together for you :)
>
> Enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

/

PART 2

Chapter 5

For fuck's sake, you spend way too much time sitting in your car, staring down buildings.

Will glared daggers at his rear-view mirror, fixated on the dive bar's ancient neon sign shining through his rear window. His car had been idling for longer than he cared to admit. The fog from his breath clung to the inside of the glass, betraying just how long he'd been sitting there. He tried to muster a self-deprecating laugh, just all one big funny joke. Instead it died in his throat, ending up something closer to a desperate grumble.

Just put the damn car in gear and drive away already. Only assholes idle.

But still he couldn't force himself to move. Instead of shifting the car into drive, Will stubbornly gripped the steering wheel; knuckles turning white, wishing that he could squeeze the pulsing life out of his frustration instead, maybe strangle the thoughts that wouldn't stop clawing at the back of his mind. Best not to give those too much air.

What the hell are you even doing here? This isn't what you really want.

He didn't want to think about what he really wanted.

The bar's red neon continued to cast its flickering grimy glow through his car windows, moisture scattering the light, sinking him even deeper into a dirty crimson haze. The sign hung precariously over the front door, taunting him to just step on up, try his luck.

This is all His *fault. Wind me up, watch me go.*

Will sighed through gritted teeth. That was unfair and he knew it, but he wasn't feeling particularly charitable at the moment. Just the memory of what he used to find in bars like this had him teetering on the edge. He could almost feel it - flesh striking flesh, the taste of his own blood...

Relief. Meagre sure, but even meagre looks damn good when you're starving.

Will gripped the wheel even harder, trying to force those thoughts back into the shadows. That definitely wasn't fair. If the man he'd been the last time he'd stepped into a bar like this knew what he had going for him now, well, *that* Will would call him a selfish bastard for complaining about hunger.

Yeah well, maybe that *Will can shove it.*

He loosed a frustrated sigh. As if his traitorous mind wasn't messing with him enough, it kept insisting on dragging up visceral flashes of what had just happened back at the office, before he'd practically thrown himself in his car and sped off, only to find himself sitting here, glaring at a dive bar sign. Will felt a jolt as the memory flooded him… the lustre and smell of spotless shoe leather, the sharp crease of impeccably tailored pants right in his eye line, the perfect ache in his knees…

God, just stop.

Will made himself slowly let go of the wheel, trying instead to focus on the burn of blood flowing back into his fingers, hoping it might ground him. Finally he dragged his eyes away from the neon sign in his rear-view, only to catch a brief look at his face instead. He had trouble meeting his own eyes. There was a desperation there that he didn't trust, a mounting recklessness he recognized from… before.

Before him.

Dr. Lecter. Hannibal. His boss. His…

Sir.

That caused him to squirm even more.

Control in release. Release in control.

Will hadn't been to one of these bars since Hannibal had given him… another outlet. It had been three weeks since that first time and the details still thrilled: the mistake-riddled letter, the bloody thumbprint, Hannibal's voice coiling inside him as he'd been ordered to bend over the desk, undeniable. The rush of anticipation perfectly shattered by the savage release of each blow, the heat and sting of Hannibal's hand. Finally... what he could never seem to get off his mind lately… the heady feeling of Hannibal's body draped over him, his weight, his breath, the overlap of their fingers, their minds...

Relief. Genuine.

After that first time, Will had lain awake all night, nerves still firing on all cylinders, emotions flip-flopping like a fish dragged out of water. The part of his mind that kept shouting at him that this wasn't normal, wasn't *ok* , slowly dying as each second of memory replayed over and over, washing through him like electric waves. But regardless of the anticipation that mounted in his gut, the *possibilities* he couldn't help but imagine, nothing could staunch his worry that maybe it had all just been some strange one-time thing, that maybe they'd both just gotten carried away in a moment that would never repeat itself. Hannibal was his boss, after all, and no matter which way Will tried to spin it, the best he could come up with was to call what had happened 'unorthodox therapy'.

But to Will's infinite relief, without missing a beat, Hannibal had seamlessly begun to incorporate such *sessions* into their daily dynamic; just one more step added to the rhythm of their routine.

It was rarely even a punishment anymore. They'd mostly dropped that pretence after the first week when Will had started to run out of creative ways to get himself in trouble, short of bursting into Hannibal's office and just bending over in the middle of a client's session. Will had wondered if Hannibal could actually smell his distress that day, his fear that without a 'reason', Hannibal would simply stop, and Will would be cast adrift without a paddle again. Instead, Hannibal had quietly, but firmly, called him into his office at the end of the day, voice undeniable as ever, and told Will to bend over the desk. Will had never felt so grateful in all his life.

But then, Hannibal had always seemed almost preternaturally attuned to Will's needs: the orders, the lessons... now the sting of each fierce slap, hand, ruler, belt, all vicious but grounding, almost blissful. Some days more, some less, but always that exacting presence, those stinging lessons in care that sometimes looked like reward and sometimes like punishment, but that always felt like relief and clarity.

Everything that had happened that night, everything that had happened in the weeks since... Will couldn't deny how much he'd already come to crave it, how it somehow scratched an itch inside him that he'd never been able to reach before. And while he still found himself shying away from examining it too closely, he couldn't deny its power.

The pain, even the promise of it, seemed to ground him somehow. The hum of their routine comforted him. Pursuing perfection in the tasks set for him by Hannibal, being of service, it made

him feel useful, *elevated* even. The constant exacting orders of Hannibal's command quieted his mind, made him feel like maybe he was actually worth the attention, perhaps even *cherished* in a way that made his cheeks burn but his heart quietly crave.

It was, quite simply, something he'd never known he needed, but already couldn't imagine living without, and all of it was wrapped up in *Him, Him, Him*.

Christ, if you're so damn satisfied, why are you prowling outside this filthy bar?

Will sighed, scrubbing his palms over the stubble on his cheeks. Sometimes he wished he could be a little *less* incisive with himself. He could still feel himself trying to avoid his own question, trying to deny what had driven him back here tonight after all this time. He hadn't even thought of a bar like this in ages.

The truth was that lately, woven closely between those complex threads of satisfaction, twined something sharper, something dangerous. Craving. Need. Hunger.

Try as he might to ignore it, what at first had seemed like more than enough, now felt like it might *never* be enough. And no matter how hard he tried to push those thoughts aside, Will's mind just kept insisting on dragging them into the light with irritating regularity, growing stronger day after day... until this evening, when he'd found himself practically fleeing from Hannibal's office after their session, only to wash up in front of this bar, aching for…

A deep growl pressed behind his clenched teeth.

Dammit, can't you even admit it to yourself?

Will's eyes flicked back to the neon sign in his rear-view, and his hand went to the door handle. He could feel himself teetering on the edge, his mind flirting with one last-ditch attempt to deny the truth of what he really wanted. But he was so tired. Tired of wanting and resisting, tired of being afraid of what it could mean.

Will felt his resistance losing its grip, the frayed muscles of his mind finally releasing the last of their tenuous hold on his denial. He knew he couldn't run from it forever. He had to face it. Name it.

Will took a deep breath, and moved his hand away from the door handle. Tasted the name of his need on his tongue.

Hannibal.

The fact was, in spite of everything that had happened, despite the overwhelming intimacy of what was growing between them, Hannibal Lecter had never once touched him… like *that* . Not in all these weeks. Not even once.

And it was making Will crazy.

Spankings were always over his clothes, never straying outside the bounds of methodical, albeit intimate, corporal punishment. Even during the quieter lessons of the day, all the little touches inherent within their regular bounds seemed fair play, but never, not once, had Hannibal touched him *sexually* . He'd never even acknowledged how hard Will would get during a session, cock

straining at the front of his pants each and every time; that moment the rawness of his breath tipped from pain into need. *Not once.*

To be fair, Will had to admit that he'd never acknowledged it either... if one could discount his painfully insistent, not to mention embarrassingly obvious, physical indication. The fact was, he'd never felt like this before, and the ferocity of his need had caught him entirely by surprise. He'd done his fair share of mental gymnastics around it too… trying at first to pretend like it was just some kind of strange, unintended side effect of their sessions together, something unimportant and beside the point. He'd tried his best to focus instead on his gratitude for what he was getting, willing it to drown out what his body clearly wanted. At first he was even thankful that Hannibal hadn't called attention to it either, that he had simply allowed Will to pretend it wasn't happening.

But now, like a snake chasing its own tail, Will couldn't figure out if Hannibal was following his queue, or if he was following Hannibal's. All he knew was that he couldn't pretend anymore. He had tried so hard to ignore it, to stop himself, but it was like pumping the brakes when he knew the line had been cut, hurtling him towards some unseen cliff with no one to catch him. It was dangerously familiar to the feeling he'd wrestled with in the FBI, and he was getting so tired of denying what he wanted, of what he needed, of *who* he needed.

Sometimes Will was sure that Hannibal was struggling too, that something hungry lurked just beneath that unshakable facade. It wasn't as if he didn't flay Will open with those eyes every damn minute of the day. Will could feel him watching as he polished his shoes and tied his ties, as he typed, as he sat to be sketched, as they spoke to each other about all manner of things, late into the night. Will was almost certain he could see his own hunger reflected back at him, hear his need echoed in Hannibal's quietly quickened breath. But Hannibal had never once pushed for more, never crossed that line or ordered Will to do so. He never *took* , no matter how much Will secretly wished he would.

You know he's not going to do that. He doesn't force you into anything except admitting what you want. Damn him.

Will forced a deep breath. He closed his eyes and ground his ass into the seat of his car, seeking out lingering traces of sensation, habitually chasing the familiar ghost of heat and soreness, the sharp bite of a welt. It felt like tugging on the tether that connected him to the office, to Hannibal. Often it was enough to ground him, or at least take the edge off. Tonight, it only served to wind him up even more.

Will could hear his own rough breath over the idling car engine. It seemed overly loud in the small space, heavy, confined, edged with need.

Obscene.

He let out a groan before he could stop himself. His cock was just as hard now as it had been before he'd fled to his car, their session after work having nearly sent him careening over the edge. He'd almost lost control and disgraced himself… only holding on long enough to mutter a tense "Thank you, Sir" before rushing out of the office to his car.

You're going to pay for that exit tomorrow. Rude.

That thought made Will squirm again, bringing his hands to rest lightly on the tops of his thighs, tracing what he knew were raised red stripes under fine wool. Gifts, each of them. He could hear his breath coming faster as he rubbed at them harder, feeling where each and every one of them had

bloomed where Hannibal had snapped the ruler down. It all burned bright in his mind, the sharp bite of each strike, the whistle of wood in the air, the sound of Hannibal's even breath mingling with his own quiet gasps. Pain, pleasure, all of it becoming one with Hannibal's undeniable command, holding him together.

You know what you need right now, what you want to do. Why keep pretending? He's not even here to see you.

But Will knew that had stopped being true. Hannibal's attention, his voice, his command - he was with him every second of every day. Will carried his presence like a talisman, a source of strength, and even pride. He hated that he'd fled from him tonight, hated that he'd felt he had to.

Sir.

Will sighed and closed his eyes, conjuring up an image of Hannibal, immaculate in his suit, standing over him, the smell of the shoe polish, the ache in his knees… Eventually, Will opened his eyes again and slowly pulled a small object from his front pocket, placing it on the dashboard directly in front of him.

A red pen. *His* red pen.

Will fixated on it immediately, forgetting the neon in his rear-view. He turned off the car, plunging himself into the welcome anonymity of darkness. He kept his eyes locked on the pen, *on Hannibal* . His fingers left the welts on his thighs, edging over to where his cock swelled at the front of his pants. He hesitated briefly before sliding his palm down his full length, eyes riveted on that red pen. It pulled a deep groan from him that he didn't try to stifle. It sounded loud in the confined space.

Decadent.

In a rush of boldness, Will let his hand grip his cock, squeezing hard through the wool, and freely loosed another moan. One last moment of doubt. He knew this was just fanning the flames, but dammit, if he wasn't going to let himself go into the bar, he was sure as hell going to let himself have this.

Will kept his eyes fixed on the red pen as his fingers worked fast to undo his belt. The sound of the buckle, the thick leather, even that was a sharp reminder, feeding into his mounting thirst.

He quickly pulled himself free. He knew he wouldn't last long, and at this point he was past caring if anyone saw. At the first pull of his hand around his cock, he loosed another moan, tipping his head back finally to close his eyes, letting the entire evening wash through him, the bright pendulum of his memory wiping away the grime of his current surroundings, showing him instead what he needed to see, the dirty neon glow replaced with low sunlight beaming through the tall windows and columned galleries of Hannibal's office. Will stroked himself in long indulgent pulls as Hannibal's voice sounded in his ears…

'I believe we'll try something a little different today, Will. Come closer.'

The tether pulling him further into the office. Last patient gone. All other tasks complete. Anticipation, blooming for hours as he'd typed, as he followed direction. Their dance. Their dynamic of perfection.

‘Kneel, Will. Right here.’

Sinking to his knees where he is told: the hardwood this time, not the carpet. Traces of old resistance, old retorts, old forts - all getting easier to ignore, easier to scale, crowded out by curiosity, relief, desire. Only one wall to devil him now, but he doesn’t want to think about that. He feels himself stirring, tries to ignore it, to focus only on what is being asked of him, on what is being given.

Sure hands ease his jacket down and off, fingers brushing his neck at the collar, gliding down the backs of his arms. Shivers. Freedom to move, freedom to feel. Measured footsteps move around him, coming to rest in front of him, so close he’s forced to tilt his head back, baring his throat. Backlit by the afternoon glow, Hannibal’s expression is shadow, but his voice is strong and clear. Undeniable.

‘It’s time for you to polish my shoes, Will.’

It is that time. The comfort in routine. But this is different; his knees are already starting to sing underneath him, the shoes in question still firmly on the feet before him. His usual chair for this task seems miles away. Uncertainty threatens to break the spell.

‘Sir?’

The supplies are quietly set in front of him, implication clear.

‘I will no longer be removing them for you. I believe you’ve shown yourself capable of the care required not to make casualties of my cuffs. You’ll stay up on your knees, no sitting back.’

A hint of play, but mixed with a darker daring. It fills him, glowing, warm, adding flavour to the heat already rising. He lets his world narrow to that tone, the smell of the polish, and the enormity of the presence before him as he kneels like a supplicant. So close. His reply is clear. There is no other.

‘Yes Sir.’

He can hear the smile in Hannibal’s response. A small triumph. A prize worth all manner of effort.

‘Good, Will.’

He sets to work, but his usual gentle calm in this task is elusive. Hannibal is too close, their posture too intimate, impossible not to draw parallels. His knees ache and he can’t help rocking slightly, tipping forward to relieve the pressure, even closer… He tries to control his breathing but he knows it’s loud in the quiet room.

Is it his imagination or does Hannibal’s breath also quicken as he works? He doesn’t dare look up. Eyes on his task. Anticipation mounting as leather starts to shine. He knows what will come after.

He doesn’t have to wait long, or even to move. As he finishes, he tries not to freeze as Hannibal slowly brings his hands around from where they were clasped behind him. Tries to steady his breathing as he sees the wooden ruler. His reward.

‘Hands behind your back, Will. Grasp your elbows. I know I won’t have to remind you to stay up on your knees, but make sure you have your balance.’

Anticipation thrums through him, but he barely has a heartbeat to set his knees and grip his elbows before the first bright lash hits his thigh. Hannibal's movements are quick but graceful, elegant, like a predator striking prey, biting into him again and again, moving around him in circles: first his thighs, then his ass, his thighs again, round and round, enough that Will loses count. Sinks. Drifts. Soars.

He is wrapped in mounting pain and need and pleasure, his knees a growing torment, melding with each sharp snap of the ruler and the growing ache in his cock. Caged in his pants it juts out in front of him obscenely but is entirely ignored, as always. He can hear a deep moan building behind his clenched teeth. The world has narrowed to the smell of polish on rich leather, a cleansing haze of pain, and Hannibal's presence. His mind is full of only two imperatives: his desire and his desire to do as he's told, coiling into one single, all-encompassing thought as Hannibal brings down the ruler one last time and comes back around to stand before him.

His.

A sudden burst of overwhelming gratitude courses through him and he chases that feeling, letting himself finally tip, all the way to the floor. Before he can think, before he can stop himself, he's pressing his lips to Hannibal's shoe.

Neither of them moves, their breath caught together. He lingers, lips pressed hard into the leather, feeling the swell of whatever this is begin to overwhelm him.

Yours.

But as the stunned silence spins out, he can already feel the heat starting to rise to his cheeks. Doubt creeps in around the edges. He starts to rise, uncertain; can't tear his gaze from the smudge his lips have left. In a flurry he grabs the rag… tries to undo it, tries to do what he's told, mind fumbling at an apology he can't seem to get enough air to utter...

Suddenly freezes as strong fingers comb through his hair. It sends a full body shiver coursing through him, nerve endings singing with pleasure. Startles a groan out of him. His face is burning and he is so, so hard. He squeezes his eyes shut and drops the rag, hands clenched into fists. It's all too much. But Hannibal's fingers tighten, gripping the back of his hair, possessive, forcing his head back and up. His voice, when it comes, is a quiet growl, rough.

'Will, look at me.'

He can't help but do exactly as he is told, flayed open, nothing he can hide. He knows he is hard and obvious, and his cheeks are red, but he does as he's told. And he is rewarded. The look on Hannibal's face is a revelation, predatory and triumphant. Proud.

'Good boy.'

And that is enough. Entirely untouched, he can feel his orgasm threatening to betray him, spine tight, breath in ragged gasps. In a panic he lurches to his feet, wrenching himself from Hannibal's grip and grabbing his jacket to ball up in front of him. He rushes to the door, muttering a string of thanks and expletive laden excuses. He doesn't look back. He doesn't want to see Hannibal's expression...

But as Will felt his climax mounting once again, this time right there in the front seat of his car, he chose instead to block out that final part, to forget his mad dash from the office, away from

Hannibal. No, this time he wouldn't deny himself. His cock was heavy in his hand, his strokes becoming faster, more erratic, the windows fully fogged now. He imagined the feel of Hannibal's grip on his hair, the taste of leather on his lips, the sound of those words of praise. He locked eyes on the red pen and imagined Hannibal watching him, that predatory smile all the approval he needed…

Thank you, Sir.

Will came so hard it wrenched a guttural cry from him, wave after wave, until he lay limp and panting behind the steering wheel.

But even through his haze, the relief didn't last nearly long enough. As he came back to himself, his thoughts circled round and round, like a bird in a cage that can't find the open hatch, battering itself in desperation. Shame, desire, doubt, resolve - the full force of his situation came crashing down on him.

This isn't sustainable.

He knew he couldn't give this up. He *wouldn't* give this up. But...

He had to do *something* . He was so tired of doubt and denial, of listening to that voice in his head that told him none of this was normal, or right. It felt right, and he *wanted it,* dammit, wanted *Him* . Will knew it was time for the same resolve that had sent him barging into Hannibal's office with a bloody letter and a dare. Once again, he was standing at a line in the sand, but this time it seemed he needed to drag Hannibal Lecter over it with him.

For the first time all night, Will could feel the ghost of a wry smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

Ready or not, Doctor Lecter…here I come.

Chapter End Notes

As always, we thank you for reading!

Kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are magical and we thank you for leaving them :)

We will be posting the rest of the chapters through to completion every two weeks, so stay tuned and hit that subscribe button!

You can find us over on Tumblr at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup. And on Twitter @MyDesignHanibl and @fragile_teacup XO

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

> Thanks to everyone for your incredible support of this fic! We've been living for all your comments and kudos and boosts!
>
> We've been busy getting this chapter ready for everyone (it's a longer one this week!), but we promise to respond to each and every one of you soon.
>
> Happy reading ❤️🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 6

Beneath a blushing sky, Will strode up the path towards the familiar gothic portico. Six steps to the front door. With every one, a counting off. Herringbone overcoat, check. Favourite salmon shirt, check. Hair tamed into artfully arranged curls, check. A dab of new cologne, courtesy of Floris in London, check.

Alright, Doctor Lecter, it's time to show you just how good a fisherman I can be. Let's see if you can resist taking this bait.

He glanced at himself in the polished steel plate that proclaimed Hannibal Lecter's ownership to the world. Blue eyes gleaming with determination stared back. *Atta boy* . Fishing out his keys, a steadying breath before opening the door. And...

'Good morning, Will.'

Pausing at the threshold of the outer office, key still in the lock, Will blinked. At 8.55, Hannibal should by rights have been tucked away neatly in his office. Writing at his desk or feeding his black orchids via syringe or washing up in his ensuite. These were all morning practices in which he engaged daily. Links in a comforting chain of routine. Hannibal out *here* , in *Will's* domain, was something else. Not threatening exactly, but so much for his plan to waltz in and put Hannibal on notice. Now he was the one on the back foot, a deer in headlights.

Say something.

Hand on hip, suit jacket unbuttoned to reveal the strap of one black suspender (*dear gods*), Hannibal stood before the coffee maker, his expression not angry, exactly, but cold. To Will that was infinitely worse.

Say good morning.

The Antonio Valente three piece today, blue and black check, over a rust coloured button-down and burnt orange paisley tie. An ensemble that generally signalled lazy indulgence. Perhaps an invitation after hours to share a glass of Montrachet or Chianti. Unexpected after the shit-show of the previous night. Maybe he wasn't going to have to pay for his misstep quite as dearly as he had thought. Maybe his plan still had legs. If he could just...

Say anything.

'What the hell are you doing?'

Anything other than that.

Surprise lifted Hannibal's brows; amusement tweaked the corners of his lips. 'Getting my morning coffee.'

Will's eyes flicked to the machine, which seemed to hiss at him in smug retribution for all of his past muttered expletives.

'You're making it yourself?' Closing the door a shade too abruptly, Will shrugged off his coat. On the brink of hanging it up, he slung it instead with deliberate carelessness over the back of his chair. 'Why didn't you wait for me to do it?'

Hannibal's eyes flicked from the coat to Will's face, amusement now all but vanished. 'Perhaps because after you rushed out so precipitously last night, I was unsure what time you would choose to make an appearance this morning - if, indeed, you intended to return at all.'

'Of course I intended to return,' Will snapped, a hint of mockery in the repetition, thrusting his hands into his pockets.

Another infraction. Just keep racking them up, Graham.

Amber eyes narrowed.

'I'm surprised you could work out how to use that ridiculous thing.' On and on, a runaway train of provocation, cheeks heating as he watched Hannibal's deft fingers playing across the machine, repositioning his cup, twisting the tap to release a thick stream of liquid. Taking Will's cherished job. Taking his *agency* . 'Talk about style over substance.'

'*Will*.'

The lash of his name brought blissful relief and a thrill up his spine. Immediate. Corrective. For a few seconds, his eyes fluttered closed, breathing slowing.

'I'm sorry, I -' The words died at the iciness of Hannibal's expression. A lump in his throat, then, at how wrong it was all going, and a clutch for balance. 'I'm sorry, *Sir*.'

The briefest of nods at his correction. Retrieving the steaming cup, Hannibal paused, hauteur personified.

'When you have located the rest of your manners, Will, you may bring me a second cup of coffee and the mail. Until then, I suggest you attend to your morning tasks, and do whatever is necessary to compose yourself. Do I make myself clear?'

Will nodded, frozen to the spot as Hannibal stalked off, disappearing into the inner office and closing the door with a decisive click.

Doesn't even want to watch you when you're at your desk. Great. Well-fucking-done. Seduction plan entirely on track.

So much for resolve and the drawing of new lines.

With a defeated sigh, he turned away and surveyed the scene of his mini-disaster. *Okay, first things first*. Unclenching his hands, he pulled them from his pockets and plucked up his coat. Smoothed an apologetic hand over it before hanging it carefully on its customary hook. *Better.* Threw the coffee maker a baleful glance. *That* ordeal could wait a while longer.

With no comfort forthcoming from the man behind the frosted glass door, Will sought it in total immersion in his morning routine. He would salvage this fiasco one task at a time.

Just as you were told.

First, the plants: checking for wilted leaves, dead-heading the blooms that had appeared a week or so back, watering the compost, and finally - his favourite part - delivering a light spray of mist that sparkled beneath the lights. A soothing checklist that fed his desire to nurture.

Dogs and plants. Harder to make a complete ass of yourself with them, isn't it?

What remained of his early tasks was rather more prosaic. Checking messages on the machine (just two this morning: a clipped request from Margot Verger to reschedule her five o'clock to the end of the week, and a wince-inducing nervous babble that Will finally managed to translate as a plea for an extended session from Franklyn Froideveaux). Writing up Hannibal's appointments for the day. Sorting the mail.

But this morning, the porch lockbox yielded only one envelope: long, slim, scented, the address handwritten. Ms Komeda's flirty, flighty style. Doubtless yet more symphony gala business.

Great. There goes any hope of coaxing him back into a good mood.

Finally, the coffee. Despite lingering traces of frustration over Hannibal's earlier punishment, Will was glad of the chance to reclaim his post, and he found himself almost lulled by the elegance of a process that refused to be rushed: a dance of glass and silver, coffee grounds and water, flame and condensation. By the time he had opened the tap, pouring nut-brown liquid into the second of Hannibal's new favourite set (embossed platinum patterned on squat bone china cups), his mind had settled into semblance of the stillness that was reflected in the millpond calm of the coffee as he carried the tray carefully through to the inner office, daytimer tucked beneath his arm.

Before the door, he paused. Should he knock? Just how much had he set himself back last night? This morning? He wouldn't usually knock. But then, the door wouldn't usually be closed…

His first rap was more tentative than he would have liked. The next, as seconds ticked by which threatened the perfect temperature of the coffee, less so, as he tried to regain even a hint of his earlier confidence.

'Come.' Peremptory.

Endeavouring not to scowl, Will turned the handle and walked into the office, taking care to maintain perfect balance of the silver tray. He set it before Hannibal in its usual position before straightening up, trying to keep his posture somewhere between contrite and confident.

'Your coffee... Sir.' Ending on a husky note. An olive branch.

Which was promptly snapped in half.

'Have you forgotten something, Will?'

Dammit, what now?

He seemed to be piling mistake on mistake, offence on offence. Brow creased, frustration reared its acerbic head as Will returned his attention to the silver tray.

Polished to perfection, so it's not that. Coffee cup nestled on its matching saucer, not a drop to mar its precious aesthetic. Linen napkin beside it, the 'simple' concertina fold he likes. So what…

Colour drained as the penny dropped. Ms Komeda's letter. The damn mail. How could he have forgotten? *Careless.* Hannibal had asked him for three things: manners, coffee, mail.

Fix it.

His eyes sought Hannibal's. *Manners first.* 'The mail. It wasn't (*deliberate*)... I wasn't (*trying to provoke you*)...' Frustration at the shambles of his plan was making him clumsy, stealing his words, clouding his head. He hated appearing this flustered.

Gaze steely, Hannibal set down his pen and extended his hand. 'My appointment diary, please.'

He doesn't even want me to go through it with him.

Disappointment settling hollow in his stomach, Will handed it over. He just wanted to get the hell back to his office - to re-group before his frustration resulted in another disastrous lashing out.

‘Your messages?’ he let himself mumble.

‘Can wait.’

‘I’ll - bring you the mail, then.’

Will turned away. Once on the other side of the door, he paused. Should he leave it open? Retrieving the letter would only take a second, so it seemed pointless to close it. But he was in sore need of a little privacy in which to compose himself and he’d be damned if he’d let Hannibal see him sitting there with his head in his hands. In the end, he compromised by pulling it gently to, trying to keep his groan sub-audible.

With the offending letter back in his possession, Will slumped against his desk, trying to re-gather the tattered edges of his plan around him. The fact was, being on the back foot or not, Hannibal’s air of simmering command had him all worked up again, those icy eyes and the threat they contained sending shivers through him, reminding him of the resolve he’d felt before the morning had gone to shit.

This - his mood, my unravelling - is all about yesterday. There’s a lesson here, there always is. So just… find it and make it right.

Frame by frame, his mind clicked through those final moments between them the previous evening, before he’d practically run from the office. Head bowed, grateful, worshipful, wanting. *His. Yours.* Hannibal’s fingers in his hair. God, the moment they had *tightened* . ‘*Good boy*.’ The air around them heavy with Will’s arousal.

Until fear had cracked its whip over his head.

But what had happened then, in his rush to hide his arousal? He’d dared only one glance back at Hannibal as, clumsy in his shame, he had torn himself away. Caught the edge of a look that he’d been too distraught to process. Time now to reexamine it, envelope playing through his fingers as he replayed the moment.

Will, gasping and crimson, one purred command away from coming in his pants. A flickering light, turning blood-black eyes to burnished copper. Lips tilted fractionally upwards. Hannibal Lecter, a study in… anticipation.

He had wanted it.

To see Will give himself over entirely. No pretence, no polish. No forts. An exercise in total trust. A leap of faith. And Will had blown it. So afraid of being rejected, he’d never even entertained the possibility that Hannibal might have approved. Might have studied the slow-spreading stain at Will’s groin the way some people study highly-prized art.

The revelation was bittersweet, but the possibility raised the hairs on the back of his neck. One thought remaining. *How do I fix it?*

A gesture was needed. Something far bigger than a conciliatory word and a bowed head. Since when had Hannibal wanted a mere *sorry* from him anyway? No, what Will needed was something

that would broadcast both his contriteness and his yearning for *more*. After all, the greatest risks yielded the greatest rewards, didn't they?

Does an apologetic dare even exist*? Is that a thing?*

He glanced down at the letter in his hand. Raised it in a waft of Chanel (*give it up, dear*), tapped it against his lips. And smiled.

The carpeting in Hannibal's office was sparse but luxurious: a couple of antique rugs, exotic splashes in a sea of grey oak. The wood continued out into the hallway and extended into Will's outer office, which was graced with a sole rug of dark maroon positioned for the benefit of visitors beneath the twin Hepplewhites. Consequently, when Will sank to his knees, the impact of bone on hardwood drew a slight 'oomph' of discomfort that drew his thoughts inexorably back to the previous night.

It was the merest breath of sound, so surely…

Tap. Tap. Tap. Unhurried but unmistakable. *He's coming* .

The choice was clear: invent a reasonable excuse for being discovered on all fours in his favourite suit (the first that Hannibal had purchased for him, rust silk shirt accidentally complementing his boss's, black tie, charcoal two piece) or… commit to the moment and trust his instinct.

The shadow of a hand on glass. *Time's up*.

A thrill of determination stiffened Will's spine. Carefully, he folded his lips over his teeth (*avoid teeth marks, keep the envelope dry*) and clamped down around the letter. Just enough pressure to keep it perfectly horizontal. Centred. Head up, palms planted on the floor, arms straight, back arched.

Presenting. For him.

At the thought, a hitch in his breathing, cock twitching. Eyes pinned on the door, which swung open to reveal Hannibal, silhouetted and stony-faced. A pause as he registered Will's position, the envelope clamped between his lips. For a dreadful second, the possibility that Hannibal would simply shut the door on him again hung over Will like a wielded axe. Then a subtle shifting, a barely-there smile, smoky eyes catching fire, stoking Will's resolve, melting the ice between them.

'The mail, Mr Graham. I believe you've kept me waiting long enough.'

I think we've both kept each other waiting.

Will tilted his head, coy, and looked up at Hannibal through his lashes. With another almost imperceptible smile, Hannibal turned on his heel, leaving the door open as he returned to his desk, and Will's heartbeat stuttered with anticipation. *That's an invitation.* His cock twitched again as he watched Hannibal resume his seat, lean back, and regard him with a look of haughty expectation.

It's on. Don't fucking blow this. Show him that you'll give yourself up entirely. To this. To him. To us...

Tether pulling taut again as he started moving, moored by Hannibal's gaze. Hannibal drawing him in, a slow crawl towards total trust. But Will could feel how Hannibal, too, was being reeled in;

could feel his hook land and lodge in his mark. With every move, his cock grew heavier between his thighs. With every slap of palms on wood, Hannibal's eyes lit, liquid gold.

Still a tinge of uncertainty, a shiver of apprehension. *That's what you get for rewriting the script. For daring him, for daring yourself.* Exhilaration reeling him in regardless. Across the outer office floor and into the inner sanctum, crawling beneath the blank-eyed stares of Japanese geisha catching fireflies, framed in the act.

Will stalked forward, eyes locked on Hannibal's, a willing subjugation that dusted his cheeks with colour but filled him with heady daring. The only sounds, hands and knees on hardwood and their mingled breathing. His own, shallow, pulse-quickened. Hannibal's, even, regular. Finally he reached the fringe of the Turkish rug beneath the desk. Closer, emboldened by Hannibal's complicit silence, until the edge of the letter kissed Hannibal's pants leg. There, Will stopped. Head lowered, eyes raised. Seeking… something. Forgiveness, acceptance, *participation*.

'Well.' A rolling indolence in Hannibal's tone, a daub of pink on sculpted cheekbones that matched Will's, belying his apparent nonchalance. 'Head up, Will.'

A thrill of triumph as Will complied. *He wants this as much as I do*. Attentive, then, eager for the next morsel, whether command or praise. It came in the form of a hand outstretched, palm up, the merest twitch of long fingers in subtle beckoning. Carefully, Will laid the envelope in Hannibal's hand. A beat and he released it. For long moments, then, Hannibal gazed down at him, eyes molasses-dark and full of fire.

'Mine.'

And Will was forced to close his eyes against a desperate rush of emotion, thoughts tumbling, love-tossed.

Yes, yes. I am. Oh, god, I am.

Now who's hooked?

His voice, when he found it, was barely above a whisper, struggling around the lump in his throat.

'Yours.'

'Say it again, Will. Louder.'

'Yours, Sir.' This time with all the confidence and need he had burning in his veins.

A smile like warm honey. Will's heart beat harder at the sight, spine tingling. He held his breath as Hannibal sat back in his chair and considered him for what felt like an age. Had he learned his lesson? The coffee, the closed door, such seemingly tiny things to take away from him - but to lose them along with the warmth in Hannibal's eyes had been a more effective correction than the sharpest whip. The knowledge shivered through him.

Never taking those coal-hot eyes off of him for an instant, Hannibal placed the letter on his desk, decisive, only to lower his hand to his thigh where he turned it palm up, crooking his finger once again for Will to come closer.

Instinctively, Will crawled forward, keeping his eyes firmly on that upturned hand, the instruction becoming more implicit as he inched ahead. So close now… finally placing his chin in Hannibal's cupped palm, a warm and waiting reprieve; Hannibal's fingers gently closing around his cheeks to hold him there, the minute rasp of a thumb on his stubble. Will sighed as his eyes rolled closed.

Relief, like a wave.

Hannibal said nothing, merely waited as Will found that quiet centre inside himself, so inextricably wrapped up in whatever this was between them; his chin gently resting in that upturned hand, eyes closed, frayed nerves slowly calming. Will stayed on the floor by Hannibal's feet, crowding in close, pressing against his leg, drawing comfort from the feel of him. The stillness of the office seemed to flow into him, the quiet strength, like it was all somehow an extension of Hannibal himself, his will, there for him to draw into his lungs and heart with each slowly lengthening breath. It felt almost like a separate space he'd entered, this surrender, one he could float in forever. Will let himself drift.

Hannibal allowed him to stay like that for what seemed like an age, each moment an indulgence, almost decadent. The morning sun traced the beginning of its arc along the floor. Will couldn't have said how long they stayed like that - it couldn't truly have been very long - only that it was enough. Eventually though, Hannibal's voice permeated, a quiet tether, soothing, deep, pulling him back to the world.

'Good boy, Will. Come, now. Sit up. On your knees.'

Will complied, still feeling strangely floaty. Not dreamlike exactly - the world still felt remarkably vivid, and his skin thrummed with an almost electric current - but things felt oddly *simple* somehow, uncomplicated, as if the whirl and tilt of his mind had slowed for once, and he could simply sit and wait on Hannibal's instruction, chin resting in that warm, comforting grip forever.

As he came back to himself, Will realised that, while he wanted many things from Hannibal, (*need you*), *this* feeling was a remarkable gift, something he'd really never felt outside of the office. Something he shouldn't take for granted. Strangely, the closest thing he could compare it to was when he was out fishing alone, wading into the quiet of the stream, sun flecks kissing the water flicking off his lure. When it was just him and the endless rush of water, trusting that if his cast was true, he would be rewarded with the catch he sought.

Perhaps not such a strange comparison after all.

When Will finally opened his eyes, he found himself pinned in place by Hannibal's avid gaze. Hannibal's fingers still held his chin as he leaned forward in his chair. Closer, closer. The frantic urgency Will had been feeling all morning (*all week, admit it*) may have dimmed as he'd sat there quietly - and thankfully so - but that didn't stop the ember of his need from flaring back to blazing life as he felt Hannibal's thumb move, shifting from his cheek to trace across his lips; soft at first pass, almost tender, but then more insistent, dragging hard enough to part them, sampling the wetness on Will's lower lip, sliding over his teeth, his fingers tightening their grip on his jaw.

Hannibal held his eyes with rapt intensity, the hint of a wicked turn at the corner of his mouth… until with an almost imperceptible nod (*let me in*), he pressed his thumb in harder, pushing all the way, deep inside Will's mouth.

Will didn't even try to stop the moan that tumbled from him, out and around Hannibal's invading thumb as his eyes rolled back and he took him all the way in. His cock filled immediately, heavy

and insistent. Hannibal's thumb swept across his tongue, pushing towards the back of his throat. Exploring. Claiming. *Owning*.

Oh God.

Will knew he was lost. But that also, just maybe, he had already won.

He didn't hesitate, just closed his lips around Hannibal's thumb and sucked, hard, eager, his heart soaring with heady triumph as he heard Hannibal's breath catch around a heavy exhale. He didn't even try to hide the desperate sound he made as Hannibal slowly pulled his thumb back and out (*Let him hear how much you want it)*, still holding his face. Hannibal's voice, when it came, was a predatory growl.

'With all my knowledge and intrusion, I could never entirely predict you, Will. I can feed the caterpillar and I can whisper through the chrysalis, but... what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.'

As he spoke, Hannibal's slick thumb painted Will's lips. Will could feel his breath, cool on the wetness. He still found it hard to form sentences.

'Not beyond you. Here. Yours'

Hannibal's fingers squeezed his chin once more before finally letting him go, sitting up and back in his chair to cross his legs neatly at the knee. Will could still see the gleam of wetness on Hannibal's thumb as it tapped on the arm of his chair, his eyes blazing as he set Will firmly in his sights, burning off the last of Will's dreamlike haze.

'Tell me, Will. Why did you run?'

He didn't need to say any more. Will had known the question would come eventually, and likely when his defences were down (*consider them obliterated*). He also knew that Hannibal likely understood already, probably better than Will did himself. No, this was about making sure *Will* understood the lesson. Understood himself.

Will took a deep breath. The pendulum of calm and excitement inside him seemed to miraculously balance itself out in some fundamental way. Hannibal had known just how to manoeuvre him. Right now, there seemed very little reason to hide, or hedge his response. His forts lay in crumbled dust around him. But still, a part of him fought to remain tucked behind whatever walls remained standing.

Careful.

'Because. I want… (*you)*... more.'

A raised eyebrow. Will knew he'd need to do better, but that didn't make it any easier. He might be ready to leap - had come here this morning ready to cast his lure and catch his prize - but that didn't mean his cheeks weren't burning.

Stifling a small groan, he could feel his frustration mounting, predictably salty again as Hannibal sat there, calm, waiting for him to continue. He suddenly felt ridiculous not acknowledging the obvious, temporarily abandoning his caution, voice rising as he gestured at his erection.

‘Jesus Christ, Hannibal… Sir… dammit! It’s obvious what I want!’

The second eyebrow joined the first, perhaps the twitch of a rueful smile, but still Hannibal said nothing. Will forced his saltiness back down, knowing full well it wouldn’t get him what he wanted. Not right now anyway. Later, maybe…

Don’t lose him now when he’s nibbled at your hook. You can still taste him on your tongue.

Will didn’t hide the shiver that thought sent through him. Instead he shifted gears, tongue teasing at his lower lip, tasting the ghost of Hannibal’s skin.

Softer now, glancing up through his lashes. ‘Why won’t you touch me?’

You’re not the only one who can ask questions.

Hannibal waited for another breath, but Will didn’t miss the hunger in his eyes as he watched Will’s tongue tease his lower lip. Will’s heart was beating out of his chest. Now that he’d asked the question, he was suddenly afraid of the answer. Any answer. All the answers. But he stayed quiet, expectant. Watched as Hannibal’s expression softened somewhat, considering.

‘Did you run because you felt exposed? Did you believe I would ridicule you for your desire? Punish you for your body’s response? Perhaps just deny you your release… send you packing, so to speak?’

Will was very conscious that Hannibal hadn’t answered his question. Still, the words knocked the wind out of him. He found he couldn’t speak, merely nodded, a simple affirmation of all the fears that had beset him for so long. Waited for Hannibal to continue.

‘I demand many things of you, Will, and I will demand many more. But never anything less than the truth of what you are, what you want. You should never deny your nature, Will. Never hide from your desires.’

Will mustered a rueful expression. ‘So you want the truth of me, then? Are you saying my *desires* aren’t off the table?'

Hannibal’s expression turned more serious ‘But you must be certain they are true, Will. Sometimes the bait we cast can be a misdirection. A way to keep predators away from our more… tender underbellies.’

Now it was his turn to cock an eyebrow. ‘Are you accusing my cock of lying to you? Or to me?’’

Will could feel his hook sinking deeper as Hannibal let out a huff of a laugh, eyes briefly glancing down before locking on again.

‘I am saying, Will, that an erection does not always exist as an imperative. Obvious or not. Nor does it invariably equal an invitation.’

Will could feel his own predatory nature peeking out from behind the beginnings of a coy smile.

‘And if it did?’

Hannibal’s smile echoed his own as he rose to pace a slow circle around him, fingers trailing across the back of Will’s neck, through his hair, raising shivers that passed between them like tiny electric

shocks. Still no response to his question.

‘What is it you really want from me, Hannibal?’

Hot breath at his ear, on the back of his neck. Hannibal’s words thrummed through him.

‘Nothing less than your total and complete surrender. Blood and breath. Meat and marrow.’ The ghost of lips at his other ear now. ‘Trust.’

A beat. A surprising truth, even to him. ‘I trust you, Sir.’

‘Then you have nothing to run from, Will.’

For the second time that day, relief washed over him, and Will’s heart was suddenly beating out of his chest. He was very aware that Hannibal hadn’t yet acknowledged the question of reciprocity, had conceded nothing about actually touching him… but maybe it was enough. For now. No longer having to hide, to pretend… it might not yet be everything, but it still felt like a victory.

For now.

Will looked at the man in front of him. This man, with the power to give him everything he hadn’t even known he wanted. He held his eyes hard, suggestive, wetting his lips once again.

Sometimes you have to reel your catch in slowly.

‘I’m not going anywhere, Sir.’

Hannibal’s eyes blazed. Nothing could beat the thrill of that dark promise, that heady mix of pride and possibility tugging at the corners of Hannibal’s lips.

‘Good. Then stand up. We’re going to see what you’ve learned today. With some… additions.’ Hannibal’s playful grin turned thoughtful. ‘And perhaps soon, a surprise, a…gift.’ A moment of disarming almost-shyness, gone so quickly as to leave Will wondering if he’d even seen it in the first place, replaced by that familiar iron tone and an arched eyebrow. ‘If you’re good.’

Will stood on shaky legs, anticipation blooming in his chest. Hannibal had already moved to the armoire, returning quickly with something that sent Will’s stomach for another loop and set his imagination racing. Coiled in his hands was a long length of white cotton rope.

‘Take off your shirt and pants, Will.’ A level look cutting off a half-formed smart remark. ‘Leave your underclothes on.’

Will’s knees felt weak and his hands shook as he undid his belt. The first patient of the day was due in half an hour… surely Hannibal wouldn’t tie him up while they were here? But floating in exhilaration, in triumph, he pushed aside the old hesitancy, moving quickly to obey, eager to see where this would lead.

Clothes folded and placed neatly aside, Hannibal began circling him, setting to work at once. Lengths of rope pulled through his fingers, measured against Will’s skin, draped over his shoulders, finding the top and bottom of his sternum, his belly button, the length between his nipples. He worked quickly, efficiently, like a tailor fitting him for a new suit, sometimes moving around him, sometimes moving Will to suit his needs, turning him this way and that, deft fingers tying and looping and twisting, rope pulled over his shoulders, around his chest and waist. After a time, Will

realized Hannibal was tying him into a snug harness of sorts, diamonds of rope twisting together at points along his midline and ribs, around and between his shoulder blades, as Hannibal expertly wove and knotted his way down his torso.

Will was so fascinated by the process that he tried not to think too hard about the feeling of Hannibal's fingers and how they brushed his skin while he worked, not lingering, but hot, electric. He tried to remain pliable, obedient. He was semi-erect but had to applaud his own restraint as he kept himself from pressing into those dexterous hands.

Until Hannibal began working lower… looping and tying around his hips now, skimming his hip bones… and lower still. Will stiffened, trying desperately not to squirm as Hannibal began passing one side of the rope up between his legs, anchoring the harness around his hips, bringing the ends back up to his waist, between his shoulder blades. Hannibal's movements were efficient, didn't linger, but Will couldn't stop himself from squirming now, pressing against the rope, testing its bounds, feeling how it barely shifted against him, the tension perfect. It felt like Hannibal's hands were everywhere, holding him fast, *owning* him.

And just like that, Will was hard as a rock again, a sheen of sweat slick on his skin. As Hannibal passed the second piece between his legs, Will looked down, couldn't help but notice how the design of the harness emphasized the stand of his cock, caught in his boxers, somehow both elegant and obscene all at once. As the last strand of rope was pulled taught and secured, it pulled his boxers even tighter against him and Will couldn't help the groan that was punched from him.

'Oh fuck, please, Sir.'

'Language, Will. You wanted more. This is more. Do you want me to stop?'

'Please, no, don't. Don't stop.'

Hannibal had started circling him again, shifting rope here and there, perfecting the symmetry of the design, checking that the knots were tight but still comfortable. Finally he grabbed the largest knot between Will's shoulder blades, forming a handle of sorts, giving it a hard enough tug to remind Will just how much control he had, just how tightly the harness held him. Each and every movement now a delicious torment.

Will's heart pounded, almost in time to the sound of Hannibal's heels on the hardwood as, finally satisfied with his work, he came back around to stand before him, eyes blazing with expectant ferocity, roving over Will's body with hungry pride, a dangerously wicked grin on his face.

'Beautiful. You were meant for this, Will. The truth now. How do you feel?'

Will was almost panting and Hannibal had barely touched him. But he didn't have to hide anymore, did he? Didn't have to run from anything. Hannibal might not yet be willing to *really* touch him, but he had given permission to his desire, even encouraged it. It left Will teetering on the edge of some vast potential that made his head spin, a vertigo of possibilities.

Truth.

Will mustered a rueful smile from behind gritted teeth.

'I feel good. I feel… yours.' (*Just say it*) ''The truth, Sir? I feel like I'm ready to explode.'

A slow, predatory smile set his insides on fire. He could feel the sweat beading on his skin, beginning to trail down the side of his face as he tried to hold himself together. He could smell adrenaline in the air, charged. Hannibal's eyes had him pinned as his fingers once again reached out to grip his chin, his voice a dangerous promise, stepping closer, no air between them now.

'To the truth, then… and all its consequences.'

With that, Hannibal's tongue snaked out to lick a long, slow stripe up the corner of Will's jaw, tongue rasping on stubble. Decadent and feral all at once. Tasting his sweat, his desperation, his need.

'Oh god… Hannibal...'

Will's eyes rolled back as he let out a heavy moan, not even bothering to pretend he could stop himself as he came hard in his boxers, orgasm crashing through him in long, indulgent waves. In the distant part of his mind that could still think, he could feel Hannibal holding him up, fingers woven into the harness.

Will was still gasping as the last shocks rolled through him, but Hannibal's voice was already hot in his ear, every hint of it dripping with iron command, absolute control.

'That is the last time you will ever come without my permission, Will. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.'

Will's spent cock still found the energy to twitch at that as he gasped for breath. In fact, if it was possible, his orgasm had left him even more aroused than before. He wanted more and more and more, and he resolved there and then to do whatever it took to get it. He would do exactly as he was told, prove to Hannibal just how good he could be, how worthy of reward.

Hannibal's expression was inscrutable as he watched Will pull himself together, caught somewhere between hungry and amused, almost playful. Will barely had his breath back before Hannibal straightened up, clasping his hands in front of him so that they let out a rousing clap.

'I believe we have time for one more task before conceding to the prying eyes of our patients. I want you to make some copies for me, Will. I will need them for my first appointment.' A single sheet of paper produced from behind him on the desk, held before Will's eyes like a treat, accompanied by a subtle grin. Will knew better than to make a grab for it.

He's enjoying this far too much for this to just be about simple copies. What now? Whatever it is, do it, and do it right.

Before Will could get a questioning word out, Hannibal had set the paper back down, quickly returning to the armoire and coming back with a long metal bar that appeared to have two leather cuffs attached at each end, one large metal clip in the centre. Will knew his eyes had gotten wide, but Hannibal had him turned around in a flash, using his harness as a handle. Will's breath caught as it pulled at him again, but he did his best to remain pliant.

No use in pretending you don't want whatever it is he's about to do to you.

'This is a spreader bar, Will.' Hannibal spoke as he began clipping him in. Quick, efficient. Will felt a tug on the knot at the top of his spine, the satisfying click of the centre latch. Hannibal must have left a loop there, knowing this was coming. 'You will wear it while you get my copies; ten of

them should suffice.' Leather buckled tight around his right wrist, then his left, so that the bar sat atop the muscles of his shoulders, forcing his arms outstretched like some kind of perverted saviour. 'You will also bring me my patient notes… and another cup of coffee while you're at it. I don't expect it will be easy.' Hannibal stepped back to admire his work, a pleased, albeit smug smile on his face. 'And you'll do it all, in…' A quick glance at his watch, 'seven minutes. Do it correctly and quickly, and I will release you, and you will dress over your harness before my first patient arrives. The harness you will wear throughout the day under your clothes as you complete every task assigned to you. It wouldn't do for the patients to see, but you will not escape me even when I am otherwise occupied. Do I make myself clear?'

'And if I don't do it correctly and quickly?' Will couldn't help himself, his smile mischievous, a quick flash in his mind of a red pen… the sting of a good spanking.

A slow step towards him had Will fighting with himself to hold his ground. 'Don't push me, Will.' Hannibal's tone coiled in his insides, a warning wrapped in velvet. 'Make no mistake. I have no wish for a mindless slave, but I will not be topped from the bottom. If you purposefully try to push me by not doing as I ask, I will simply release you and send you home. You wanted more, Will. This is more. Now do as you're told.'

Hannibal's words were stern, almost dangerous, but his face was still open, still amused. A warning, and one Will knew he would be wise to heed, but there was no real anger there. Not yet. Will dropped his eyes respectfully, genuinely contrite. He didn't want to push his luck, not today anyway; the last thing he needed was to undo the ground he'd gained since this disastrous morning.

'Yes, Sir.'

'Off you go, Will. Tick tock.'

Will was off at once, starting the first of what turned out to be a full day of exacting tasks, Hannibal putting him through his paces like he never had before, somehow all of it carefully orchestrated so that the patients were none the wiser.

The spreader bar was diabolical. Will had to admit that it had now usurped the coffee maker as his new nemesis; indeed, he had almost despaired at his third attempt to get all of the papers into one hand so he could tilt the other like a fulcrum to pick up Hannibal's coffee, all without spilling, or gripping the papers into a crumpled mess. It was like patting his head and rubbing his stomach, transforming even simple tasks into an exercise in endurance and concentration. His shoulders ached despite the straps holding his wrists, arms straight out at his sides. They pulled his torso around with them whenever he moved, the harness tugging against his skin, a constant reminder of Hanibal's hands. All of this while Hannibal had sporadically counted off his remaining time from the snug confines of his comfortable chair.

Still though, Will had done his best to maintain his composure, trying to sustain some level of dignity and charm as he had struggled through. He wanted to elevate his tasks to a level of beauty that Hannibal would be proud of, keeping his movements as fluid as the flick of his lure over water. When Will had finally stood before him, his task somehow completed with thirty seconds to spare, Hannibal was practically glowing. Will was sweaty and panting yet focused, triumphant, ready for the next command.

More more more more.

It was like a mantra as he threw himself headlong into the day. And that had been just the beginning. It went on, one task bleeding into the next, some frantic, some quiet. But Will found that his mind remained focused, no time for second thoughts or doubt, honed in on Hannibal's commands, trying to anticipate his needs before he had even asked.

And he had done well. Will could feel himself brimming with pride at each smile, each word of praise. His only censure all day had been a swiftly corrected smart remark (*If you want to make this harder, why don't you put the spreader bar back on and watch me try to type your notes?*). His smug grin had been quickly cut off by a cherry red ball gag neatly wedged in his mouth and the subsequent denial of his lunch. Hannibal hadn't even fully buckled it in place before Will found he was impossibly hard again, the satisfied glint in Hannibal's eye proving yet again that he knew exactly how to punish - and reward him.

As the day marched on, Will became more and more impatient for the last patient of the day to just get there and get gone. He found himself pleasantly exhausted, but also incredibly aroused. He had never been so hard for so long, so close to the edge, and Hannibal still had barely even touched him. As the minutes ticked by, closer and closer to the end of the day when Hannibal would normally call him in for his spanking, anticipation thrummed through him with each heartbeat. Will knew he would likely tip over the edge the second he felt the crack of Hannibal's hand on his ass, but for once that didn't bother him in the slightest.

And it was that thought which shocked him more than anything had so far that day. Not the spreader bar, the ropes, the ball gag, not even coming in his shorts. How *normal* it had all felt. The utter lack of the fear that had beset him for so many weeks, that nameless dread that Hannibal would not only see him for what he was, for what he wanted, but that he would reject him for it. Will had lived with a version of that fear all his life, and its sudden absence left him feeling buoyant, elated. It wasn't as if a tiny part of Will's mind didn't still warn him that maybe all of this was fucked up… that maybe he should at least *feel* like it was fucked up. But he didn't, and that was the truth. He just couldn't bring himself to care what "normal" was anymore. Looked squarely away from that.

Looked to Hannibal instead.

To the truth, then, and all its consequences.

****

Two more days passed in much the same way, dreamlike, as Hannibal put him through his paces. On the first, Hannibal had utilised the ball gag again (*got to train that sassy mouth*). On the second, Will had been bound into another harness and Hannibal had watched, amused, as Will had struggled to organise his bookshelves while strapped into that twice-damned spreader bar. He had worn the harness all day, its eventual removal proving once again that its loss was just as intense as its application, prompting equal parts relief and a strange bereftness. It was the latter that Will felt still, almost twenty-four hours later. From time to time, as he'd gone about his duties, he'd flexed his shoulders, missing the tightness. A bird without its wings. But something about the hot darkness of Hannibal's gaze had told him this day would yet yield *something*.

He was sitting at his desk, absently tracing the space bar of the Selectric, last letter of the day typed and set aside for posting, face flushed as he mused over how each of the last few days had finished for him… and how he'd finished at the end of each day. Bent over Hannibal's desk, blissful in tight awareness as each smack had resonated. Both times, Hannibal had used his hands. Both times, it had been… intimate. Will had been lavish with his moans, unabashed in his obvious arousal.

And how Hannibal had smiled… watching him squirm as he had tried desperately to keep himself from rutting against the desk as his hand had cracked against him, again and again. Hannibal's voice had been dark in his ear. *You will not come until I give you permission, Will. And when you do, you will come untouched. The sound of my voice and the privilege of my punishment will suffice. Do you understand?* Merciless in his appreciation of Will's frantic nodding and eventual hoarse pleas for release; generous then in his acquiescence...

Come for me, Will.

Those words had whispered to him through a restless night. And now, his cheeks flamed a shade darker as he waited. And waited. Finally, the telltale sounds of the last patient session ending straightened his spine. Will tilted his head, silently counting off each noise: the squeak and shifts of chairs being vacated, the clip of footsteps to the patients' exit, a murmur of goodbyes, and finally the satisfying click that signalled an empty office. Save, of course, for Hannibal. (*Saved for me . My time - our time - now*.)

'Will, come through, please.'

A turn of his head, and a smile that threatened to spread into desperate eagerness. 'Yes, Sir.' *(Right away, Sir!)*

Hold it together, Graham.

On legs that were slightly unsteady, he walked through to the inner office. Hannibal stepped aside to allow him through (*I guess we're feeling gallant this evening*) and for a few moments, Will let his eyes linger with pleasure on the mist-drenched orchids, their mossy diorama backlit and sparkling.

'Kneel for me. You know where.'

Instantly, Will's attention snapped back. Expectation flavoured the air, crackling, electric. Something was different... A few steps forward and he sank obediently onto the hardwood. Thighs straight, hands clasped behind his back, head up, eyes lowered. Then, to his surprise, a hand on his shoulder nudged him gently down to sit back on his heels, a neat fold of limbs.

'I'll not be spanking you tonight, Will.'

He swallowed the protest that rose, impetuous and demanding. Forced a level of demureness into his tone. 'If that's what you…don't… want.' Perhaps something of protestation still flavoured his words, for Hannibal paused in front of him.

'You think me unfair?' And, at the slow shake of Will's head, 'I think perhaps you do. You asked me for more, and I have given you more. You have responded beautifully and pleased me greatly.' A light caress of fingers atop his head, Will quivering at the touch. 'But as with any relationship, there must be give *and* take. For both of us.'

Relationship.

‘Quid pro quo, Will. Remember?’

‘Yes.’ Sighed out, eyes closing briefly.

‘Well, then.’ No time to regret the loss of contact, for Hannibal was circling him again. Slow, gaze possessive, *ravening*. ‘It’s time for you to give something back.’

‘Anything.’ Impulsive. Aching for something he couldn’t even name.

A flare of satisfaction in amber eyes. ‘Anything?’

Will met Hannibal’s gaze head-on, unwavering. ‘I said that I trust you... Sir. I meant it.’

Hannibal hummed, head tilted in consideration. ‘Trust is akin to power, and both are gifts to be bestowed - or withheld. Tell me, Will, do you believe that you have power over me? There on your knees, when you are polishing my shoes, or making my coffee, or bending over for a spanking whenever I choose to give it?’

A beat. (*Does he want the truth?)* A thought which had flirted in the corners of his mind from the very beginning, coalescing now to incandescent clarity. *(Of course he does.)* Overriding his hesitation, voice strengthened by conviction.

‘Kneeling at your feet, I have more power over you than I suspect anyone ever has… probably more than you’re comfortable with. Just as you have power over me - a power that I *choose* to give you, and one I could just as easily take back.’ Pinning *Hannibal* in place this time. ‘I said that I’m yours, and I meant it, but that power is mine and always will be. You can push the pieces around, Doctor Lecter, but I’m the one who sets the board.’

Dark eyes blazed with expectant ferocity. Leaning closer, a sudden tight grip on his hair. Hannibal’s voice was a dangerous promise. ‘That’s my boy.’

Oh god. Yours.

Straightening up, Hannibal released him, but his gaze was no less intense, its grip just as tight as his fingers had been. (*His fingers, the harness, the red pen. Held fast, held safe.*) Hannibal considered him for another heartbeat, two. A small nod, decisive, and a step towards him.

‘I have something for you, Will. Something that you have earned the right to wear, should you choose to accept it. Something that, within the bounds of this office, will mark you as mine.’

Without hesitation, ‘Show me.’

Will waited, breathless with expectation, as Hannibal walked across to the armoire and opened it. Upon his return, he held in his hands a slim, square box of powder blue.

‘Open it.’

Carefully, Will lifted off the lid, and stilled. He was hardly aware of Hannibal taking the lid from him and setting it on the desk. All of his focus had narrowed to the slender band of black leather that nestled on a bed of rich blue velvet. Simple in design, a single ring in the front, with an interlocking mechanism of silver at the back…

‘A collar?’ His gaze lifted, awe and trepidation lending his voice a raw huskiness. ‘For me?’

Stupid. Who else? But Hannibal’s smile crinkled his eyes with pleasure, gentling the moment.

‘A collar accepted is like a promise, Will. A pledge of devotion. This is a Consideration Collar, not as binding as a formal collar, but one which marks a significant step forward in the relationship between giver and wearer.’ Removing it from the box, which he set down beside the lid. ‘Should you choose to accept it, I will expect you to wear it from the moment you arrive at the office until the time you leave at the end of the day.’

‘How do I -’ Will swallowed, wanting desperately to touch it, to lay claim to it - to *him*. ‘Do I put it on or do you?’

Hannibal’s eyes were rapt on his face. ‘You will come to me, and I will put it on you each morning, just as I shall be the one to remove it before you go home each night.’

‘Right.’ Strange how the thought of having the collar taken from him at the end of every day already made his stomach lurch in protest.

He hasn’t even given it to you yet, and you’re already worried he’ll take it away …

As if sensing his wandering thoughts, Hannibal grasped Will’s jaw. ‘I wish to make things clear between us, Will. Should you choose to accept this gift, I will put it on you and you will wear it beneath your clothes all day. You will feel it shifting against your skin as you carry out your duties, a constant reminder of my demands.’ A pause, Hannibal’s tone somehow becoming both harder and softer at once. ‘Quid pro quo, Will. You have asked for more, and I have heard you. But now I am asking more of *you*. This collar would be an agreement between us that when you are in this office, I am the one who decides what you do and what you don’t; what you eat, and when, and how much; when you are punished, and when you are rewarded. When you can come.’ Bending down until Will could feel Hannibal’s breath ghosting across his lips, ‘But make no mistake, you will have exactly *what* I choose to give, *when* I choose to give it. From the moment you put this collar on, you are mine to use how and when I see fit. In this office, Will Graham, you will learn the true meaning of surrender. In this office, you belong to me.’

So hard not to whimper, not to lean in and learn what those lips would feel like against his own. Will closed his eyes, shuddered, forced down his rapacious *want*. When he opened his eyes again, Hannibal had straightened up. Watchful, almost brooding.

‘Well? Shall you wear my collar, Will?

As if there was any doubt. As if his heart would allow any other choice than the one he made as he tilted his chin up, baring his neck as far as he could.

‘Yes. Please.’

Chapter End Notes

* A note on a term used in this chapter... "topping from the bottom" is a term used in BDSM, the meaning of which is likely clear from the text (a sub trying to guide, manipulate, or push their Dom into giving them what they want, or to manipulate where a scene goes). It has NOTHING WHATSOEVER to do with sexual positions (or the heteronormative top/bottom debate we both despise). It's a dynamic some subs and Doms navigate based on their own preferences and experience. (although we suspect Hannibal enjoys it a little more than he lets on here!)

As always, we thank you for reading! ❤️

Kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are magical and we thank you for leaving them 🙂

We'll continue posting every two weeks, so stay tuned and hit that subscribe button!

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Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

An unexpected guest arrives, upsetting Will's first day in *Haaanibal's* new collar.

Will wonders if perhaps he's not the only one building forts... but can a new experience break Hannibal's iron restraint? Will still wants more, and he pushes to find out.

Chapter Notes

Happy reading everyone 🥰❤️🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fingers at his throat, skin tingling in their wake. A metallic click as the buckle was closed.

‘How does it feel?’

‘Good.’

Will smiled and Hannibal smiled right back. And *this* - this was what he had hungered for all night, after the fleeting taste he’d been granted the previous evening. Then it had been only a careful trying on, just a tease, the collar barely settling against his skin before Hannibal had removed it again, humming in satisfaction at the fit, but obviously having no real intention of keeping it on him for long.

It had been strangely upsetting, watching what Will already vehemently and irrevocably thought of as *his* being taken from him, boxed up and stored away. Hannibal had dismissed him with a simple, ‘Have a good evening, Will.’ Not even a spanking to relieve the tension wound taut by fleeting touches and murmured praise. Perhaps he’d had enough reward heaped on him for one day.

He was still wound tight today, but the feel of the collar settling on his skin satisfied something inside him somehow, grounded him, even as heat already built in his gut.

‘You have a beautiful neck, Will. Made for this.’ A thumb stroked lightly at the base of the collar. ‘A pity to have to conceal it.’

The words drizzled like honey and Will lapped them up.

‘Maybe I could forgo the tie. Just for today?’ Eyes crinkling in appeal, a coy smile. ‘Only when it’s the two of us, of course.’

It would be easy enough to restore any necessary formality in time for Hannibal’s appointments: four today, all back-to-back after lunch.

You’re pushing already. Careful.

Wide lips pursed in thought, hooded gaze lingering at Will’s throat, the leather collar framed by the crisp whiteness of his shirt. In a daring burst of improvisation, Will had unbuttoned it all the way, baring himself, an act that had been met with a rather satisfying flare of darkness in narrowed eyes when Hannibal had turned from the armoire, collar in hand. Still, frustratingly, there had been no attempt to push the shirt from his shoulders, to explore. Will’s nipples had hardened at even the *idea* of Hannibal’s touch (*tongue rasping against one as his thumb teased the other*). He could feel them pressing against the fine cloth of his shirt even now, oversensitive.

‘For this morning, perhaps. A treat on your first day… *our* first day.’ The faintest hint of indulgence in tones that deepened as Hannibal curled his fingers into Will’s shirt hem, drawing it together as he began to button from the bottom upwards. ‘But you will not parade yourself in front of my patients, Will. Do you understand? You will make yourself presentable before they’re expected, tie and all.’

‘Yes, Sir.’ Kept his voice as steady as possible, even as his stomach muscles quivered beneath the brush of knuckles. ‘Mr Budge is your first appointment, at one-thirty.’ And Will’s assigned lunch hour was at noon, leaving plenty of time to make the necessary adjustments.

‘Very good. You can spend the morning typing up yesterday’s case notes. Then you may eat your lunch. What have you brought today?’

‘A club sandwich, yogurt, some white grapes.’

Picked from a list that Hannibal had presented him with not long after that first day with the spreader bar, pinned in pride of place above Will’s fridge at home. At first he’d balked at having Hannibal tell him not only what to eat, but how much. But to his surprise he now found it not only acceptable, but comforting. Another lesson in care.

‘Hm. You will eat all of the sandwich but first remove the bacon. There has been too much salt in your diet recently.’

‘If you think so.’ Feeling almost demure, pleasure unfurling. ‘The yogurt?’

‘Is it organic?’

‘Yeah. Yes. Probiotic.’ He named a high-end brand that Hannibal had recommended a couple of weeks back.

‘Very good.’ Hannibal was almost purring, still buttoning him up. So close. ‘Five spoonfuls, heaped. And four grapes.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ Will sighed, happy, warm.

‘At a quarter past one, you will go to the restroom,’ murmured Hannibal, eyes still intent on his task, fingers threading wide-spaced pearly buttons through matching holes until only three remained, ‘and finish what I have started here.’ Two. ‘Make sure to tie the knot well. A half Windsor today, I think.’ One.

‘Yes, Sir.’

Will shivered, determinedly still beneath Hannibal’s ministrations. His shirt collar was smoothed down but left pleasingly loose, framing the band of leather that he longed to touch but didn’t quite dare to, not until he was alone. Finally, Hannibal stepped back.

‘You may tuck in your shirt now, Will. And then, I think, the coffee.’

Message received. Time to get back to business *(almost)* as usual. Trying not to be too ridiculously sulky that Hannibal hadn’t done the job himself, Will pushed his shirt hem back into the waistband of his pants. He smoothed a thumb over his tie, draped across Hannibal’s desk, a ribbon of blue, suggestive somehow. Picked it up and smiled, head dipped in obedience as he turned to leave.

‘And, Will?’

‘Yes, Sir?’

Will was unprepared for the tender light shining in amber eyes, and his breath caught at the huskiness of the words that followed.

‘My collar becomes you.’

****

At precisely eleven o’clock, the shrilling of the outside buzzer froze Will in the act of rethreading the typewriter.

Who the hell?

In a gesture that was almost unconscious, his hand rose to his throat, protective. Hannibal had been very clear about the conditions of this little indulgence. A quick glance into the inner office confirmed that his boss was still engaged in a call with his publisher, phone pressed to his ear, chair swung away from the door… and from the earnest hum of conversation, he would probably not take kindly to being disturbed. Maybe it was just some kind of salesperson - if so, Will reasoned, he would be well within his purview to send them packing. Only one way to find out.

Pressing the intercom, he spoke curtly into it. ‘Doctor Lecter’s office. How may I be of assistance?’

And back came the irritated, haughty tones of the one person in Hannibal’s sphere whom Will longed with all his might to send packing.

‘You may *be of assistance* by letting me in. I’m here to see Haaanibal.’

Fuck. *Fuck*. *Fucking Bedelia.*

Haaanibal, who... seemed to have vanished, chair still rocking slightly from its owner’s abandonment. Will cocked his head, listening. A creak of wood, another, another. *The ladder… He’s going up to the gallery*. But was it purely by chance or as some sort of test? Will traced the edge of the collar, the smooth hoop of metal, now flesh-warmed. Hannibal never left anything to chance. His every move was calculated. *A test, then*. He could make a grab for his tie, hanging now in the restroom. Or... Rebellion flared in his gut, spurred on by the prospect of a re-match. He *could* simply let Bedelia in. She was, after all, a friend and colleague of Hannibal’s, not a patient. A technicality maybe, but was he willing to push his bounds? Would Hannibal be annoyed or flattered if Will chose to *parade* in front of her? Maybe the better question would be, just how irritated would *she* be to see Will marked in this way - as *his? Claimed* ?

One way to find out.

Temptation winning over discretion, he stabbed the intercom and drawled with feigned nonchalance, ‘The door’s open. Come in, Doctor du Maurier.’

A click of heels across the vestibule, then the inner door swung open with a flounce of expensive blonde and an aggrieved sigh.

‘I was beginning to wonder if you had died.’ Tone indicating that such an event wouldn’t have bothered her in the slightest. ‘Where is he?’

‘On a call. It could be a long one.’ Will leaned back, smug. ‘I know you have an aversion to our chairs so I won’t ask you to sit down.’

Scarlet lips compressed to a thin line as she dangled a bag over his desk - Fendi, gold weave, with brown trim - before setting it down with a muffled thud. ‘Fine, *Mister* Graham. I have somewhere to be in any case. Just tell him I came by to return these. He’ll know my sentiments.’

‘These?’

Curiosity getting the better of him, Will stood up to peer inside the roomy tote, ignoring the imperious huff that came from Bedelia. Something - no, two things - swaddled in white muslin. Pushing aside the cloth bindings, he found a silver salver and an elegant glass dome.

‘He left them at my house after dinner the other night.’ A cruel smile and a tap of elongated nails on the lacquered surface of the desk. ‘The veal was delicious.’

Swallowing around the sudden tightness in his throat, Will lifted first the dome then the salver out of their Fendi prison.

‘Rather a controversial dish, wouldn’t you say?’

A careless shrug of Gucci-clad shoulders, but her eyes were sharp. ‘Hannibal does rather enjoy toying with young things.’

Clamping down on the urge to spit out a hot retort, Will shoved the bag back at her… and lost the battle anyway. ‘Good of you to bring them back. Brave, too, to risk a blow-out by driving all the way here yourself.’

Unquantifiably *bitchy* to literally dangle them under Will’s nose. *But if Hannibal left before they were washed up, at least that would mean that he probably didn’t stay the night. Right?*

‘Hm.’ A faint frown marred the perfection of her alabaster skin as she looked at him properly for the first time since waltzing in (*maybe for the first time ever*). Puzzlement, as if anticipating displeasure but not yet understanding why, what was different, what was - ‘Oh.’ Pale blue eyes narrowed to slits. ‘Well, well.’

For a second he’d been so focused on their little riposte, he’d almost forgotten the collar. Perversely, Will’s immediate reaction was to cover himself, to keep from her poisonous gaze the symbol of his devotion, of Hannibal’s… But he stayed his hand. Lifted his chin in challenge.

‘Something on your mind?’

‘Perhaps an observation, if you’ll allow.’

‘What?’ Guarded.

‘Only that I had thought you were different, you see.’ Voice sing-song, an affectation of pity. ‘That perhaps you’d had the good sense to stay on the other side of the veil.’

‘And what would you know about it?’

Stung, half-fearful of the answer. Because never, not *once*, despite his petty jealousy, had it occurred to him that Bedelia might actually know about Hannibal’s darker *proclivities.* And not only that, Will had gone to great lengths to *not* think about who may have come before him. He wasn’t naive enough to have convinced himself he was Hannibal’s first… whatever he was… but to be forced to confront all of that now, by *her* …

‘Oh, more than you might imagine.’ And oh, how gentle she suddenly seemed, mercilessly so. ‘Hannibal is not just my colleague, you see. He is also my patient.’

Patient… not lover.

Still, the revelation set off a whirl of thoughts Will was ill-prepared to deal with. *How many have there been? Who? Did he look at them the same way he looks at me?* Bedelia stared at him, imperious, as he floundered. It was as if she was reading every doubt in his head and *relishing* them. It set his teeth on edge.

‘You wouldn’t be thinking of breaking doctor-patient confidentiality, I hope.’ Nails curled into his palms as he glared at her.

‘I would never repeat anything told to me in confidence. However,’ she continued, smooth as oil, ‘I feel it is within my bounds to ask you a question, *Mister* Graham. Has Hannibal ever tried to persuade you to surrender anything?’ Continuing without giving him a chance to respond, ‘He will,

you know, and it will be something dear to you.' Staring pointedly at the collar. 'In fact, it seems he already has.' Will's cheeks flushed under her knowing gaze as she continued, edging even closer to him in mock confidentiality, 'What Hannibal does is not coercion, you know. It is persuasion. Friendship with Hannibal Lecter is blackmail, elevated to the level of love.' And oh, how Will loathed the secretive smile that flickered on scarlet lips. 'Just be sure you're not the only one to give something up. I'll warn you, trust does not come easily to Hannibal. He has a habit of testing people. Building walls, setting boundaries.' Her gaze flickered between Will's face and his collar. 'And I have yet to see anyone breach them.'

Her words settled cold in the pit of Will's stomach.

'Hannibal does rather enjoy toying with young things.'

Is that what I am? A toy? Just the latest in a line of amusing experiments?

His heart protested stoutly that it was not so, yet he barely even noticed when Bedelia scooped up the Fendi and with a smug, 'I'll see myself out,' strode from the office, curls bouncing, eyes shining in triumph.

The question gnawed at him through lunch, which he ate at his desk in distracted fashion (*sandwich, no bacon; five spoonfuls of yogurt; four grapes* - because despite Bedelia's venomous 'warnings', Will couldn't bring himself to disobey, to disappoint). Standing before the restroom mirror, watching himself with doubt-clouded eyes as he dutifully tied a neat half Windsor, dully covering up the collar which only a few hours before he had donned with such pride. He set about the rest of the day's tasks with one eye on the clock and a mounting resentment of the patients whose successive droning was preventing Will from seeking the comfort of the one and only person capable of giving him solace.

Not special.

The thought was an insidious chill curling around his heart, tightening in increments as he went through the motions of his afternoon, robbing him of the warmth and comfort his tasks usually provided. Again and again he found himself reaching for his collar, feeling through the thin cloth of his shirt for the hard circle of the metal ring, the edge of the leather. More than once, Will found himself drifting to the restroom, loosening his tie away from prying eyes, wanting - needing - just to *look*.

He wasn't sure what answers he expected to find as he stared into the mirror, eyes dim and uncertain in an unsettlingly familiar way. His reflection reminded him too much of the old Will, the one who'd looked back at him while he was at the FBI. Hunted. Haunted. Alone. He hadn't seen that Will since… well, since before all of this. It was a hateful reappearance - all Will wanted was to send him back to the shadows of his memory. He wanted to forget those doubt-clouded eyes for good.

Not alone anymore.

Not special.

The duality threatened to pull him apart.

Hannibal's obviously not the only one who has issues with trust.

Yet out of the mire of his thoughts, Hannibal's collar still shone like a beacon. A touchstone his fingers kept returning to, again and again. Hannibal, here with him. Hannibal, wanting him. Hannibal, holding him tight…

A tether.

No matter the insecurities that had seeped in, no matter the confusion that Bedelia's words had sown, the collar still seemed right to him, *Hannibal* still seemed right.

Will felt himself rally, pulling some of his earlier certainty back around him like a cloak. He wouldn't let Bedelia under his skin that easily. If Hannibal was the only one with answers to his doubts, then Hannibal would be their only balm…

Just be sure you're not the only one to give something up.

The shadows lengthened, and Will was still playing with the ring on his collar when he heard the last patient leave by the back door. He was already on his feet with his jacket off when Hannibal opened the inner office door, settling himself against the frame, eyes twinkling, hands clasped before him, as he watched Will loosen his tie.

'Feeling impatient, Will? You wouldn't be anticipating, would you? Perhaps I should put a pin in this evening and teach you a thing or two about patience.'

Will smirked, dragging the tie suggestively through his fingers as he pulled it off, not even unknotting it all the way as he knew Hannibal preferred, instead just pulling it over his head. He wanted the damn thing gone, daring Hannibal to call him on it.

'Oh but, *Sir*, where's the fun in that for you? Something tells me that's not what you had in mind for tonight… *Haaanibal*.'

Trying for playful, suggestive, but he knew Hannibal had picked up on his tone, the darkness in it, the insinuation, amber eyes narrowing a fraction, considering, recalibrating.

Will strolled towards the inner office, purposefully invading Hannibal's space as he passed him in the doorway, pressing against him. Raised eyebrows followed him, incredulous but seemingly still amused. Will pushed the discarded tie into Hannibal's hands and kept walking, rolling up his sleeves as he roved about the room. He needed to keep moving, needed to outrun his nerves, needed to say what he had to say before Hannibal could re-assert control.

'I had an interesting conversation with your *colleague,* Bedelia, today.' Acerbic, just the wrong side of levity. Still clutching for balance, feeling his way back. To them. Away from *her* ...

Careful.

But Hannibal didn't seem to mind, apparently ready to give Will a certain amount of slack, obviously curious what had put the edge on his mood. It provoked a sudden rush of gratitude - followed swiftly by a sliver of nerves.

Sometimes you let the fish take the line and run… before you sink your hook and reel them in.

Will threw a quick glance back Hannibal's way. He still stood by the open door to the outer office (no need to close it now that there was an end to patients and aggravating interruptions), the very

picture of relaxation: hands loosely dangling (Will's tie threaded through his fingers), jacket off, sleeves already rolled up (*have to have full range of motion for whatever you've got planned*). The thought shivered up Will's spine.

And still, the look on Hannibal's face was far from one of annoyance at his behaviour. He seemed genuinely amused, eyes sparking with interest, curiosity, almost eager.

'I see. Dare I ask what this conversation consisted of, Will? I can't imagine it was interesting enough to have warranted a second appearance of the scalpel. Or else I believe I would have heard Doctor du Maurier sound the alarm.'

Voice sparking with delight, and was that… pride? Could Hannibal actually be *enjoying* the prospect of Will sniping with Bedelia? He'd certainly not discouraged it. And the last time, the way he'd licked Will's blood from his thumb…

He sees what's inside of me… and he likes it.

The thought hit hard, the thing that lived in his belly rolling lazily, a flush of heat up his neck.

Not alone.

He forced his limbs to relax, to just keep moving around the room. Indulgent eyes tracked him as he paced the office, watching as his fingers undid yet another button around his throat, exposing his collar even more.

'No scalpel.' Will did his best to muster a mischievous grin. 'This time, anyway.' He continued to stalk the room, circling in on what he knew he couldn't just leave well enough alone. He let his fingers trail behind him as he moved, dragging over the soft leather of Hannibal's chair, the ridged surface of a column, the smooth wood of the desk. Hannibal had started to follow, each step matched with Will's own.

But who's the hunter and who's the prey?

Will made the choice to pounce first. Too eager for answers, for reassurance; he *would* drag his worries into the light of day, even if that meant exposing his more sensitive underbelly.

'*Doctor du Maurier* came to return your glass dome from dinner.' Tried to keep the saltiness from his voice, mimicking her proper title. 'She also had some… *compelling* opinions about my place here in this office… with you.' Will plucked a red pen off the desk, rubbing it absently across his lower lip as he threw a look back at Hannibal and kept moving.

'Compelling?' A raised eyebrow. 'Is she calling for your head again? Bedelia has always been… selective…with regard to those I employ.'

Not special.

Will forced that thought back down. 'If by *selective* you mean jealous, I would tend to agree. But I have no doubt that if Bedelia du Maurier wanted my head, I would need both hands to keep it on my shoulders.'

A warm chuckle. 'I rather suspect you're right.' The fondness in Hannibal's voice grated on Will's already frayed nerves. Enough to stop him in his tracks, eyes narrowed. A conciliatory nod, one

hand raised. ‘Although I happen to like your head just where it is, Will. And I believe *my* hands would do what they must to keep it there.’ An arched eyebrow and a wicked smile like a dark promise, unnamed, resonating deep in Will’s gut.

Not alone.

Conceding his appeasement, Will grinned and made a show of putting the red pen back where he had found it, then turned away and kept moving. Hannibal continued to follow, dropping Will's tie on the desk, eyes locked to his every move as measured steps echoed on the hardwood. *Drawn in*. *Hungry.*

One stalks, the other lures…

Hannibal coaxed him to continue. ‘Perhaps it was another *conversation* regarding her insistence on seeing me without having to go through you?’

Will turned away, finger running down the edge of a charcoal drawing. ‘Consider it more of a *conversation* about how *I* should be seeing *you* .’ A beat. ‘And how you see me.’

Hannibal said nothing for an interminable moment. Two. Will tried to keep his body language relaxed, forcing out the breath he was holding. Finally Hannibal continued, picked up the red pen Will had placed on the desk, rolling it between his fingers.

‘How we see ourselves can, by its very definition, affect how we believe ourselves to be perceived by others. Tell me, Will, how do you believe Bedelia du Maurier sees you, and your place here with me? I’m curious, considering the fact that it seems to have necessitated you pacing around my office when there are more… enjoyable ways to be utilizing this time.’

Will forced himself to stop moving. Time to stand, time to stare down what was hunting him: these worries, these questions, this *ambiguity*. He let his fingers slide down the red-striped silk curtains before turning to face his…

What? My what*? Boss? Sir? Tormentor? Lover?*

The question made him suddenly venomous. *Enough of this doubt*. Fists clenched at his sides, eyes locked on Hannibal’s where he stood (*still so far away*), he spat out the words.

‘She thinks I’m a pawn. An insignificant, sacrificial plaything in the grand game that is the life of Doctor Hannibal Lecter.’

A step closer. Another. The air crackled around them and Will had to fight hard to stay where he was. Hannibal’s eyes were dark now, although with anger or desire, Will couldn’t quite say.

‘Is that what she thinks? Or what you think?’

‘How many have there been?’ Will tried to keep his voice even, curious, cocking his head to the side, considering, belying the thud of his heart, the importance of the question. ‘How many “Secretaries” have come before me? And how many will come after? Am I just standing in the middle of a long line of toys for your amusement, stretching out in both directions?’

Hannibal was silent for another moment. Now that he’d asked the question, Will found he wasn’t sure he really wanted to know the answer. Almost laughed to himself as he realised it hardly

mattered; he was unlikely to get a straight one anyway. Instead he studied Hannibal's face, so often more telling than his words, his expression inscrutable but serious, considering. When he finally spoke, Hannibal's voice was softer, but no less hungry, insistent.

'Where does the difference between past and future come from, Will?'

Truth.

Will knew the answer, *his* answer, felt it in his bones. Still, he found himself turning back towards the window, hiding from his admission. The ghost of his face looked pale in the dark, rain-speckled glass, Hannibal hovering at a distance behind him like some devil on his shoulder… or angel…

Will's voice was rough but true. 'Mine? Before you and after you. Yours? It's all starting to blur. I'm clearly not the first, but I'm not so sure I should expect to be the last.'

'And is that what you would want, Will? The lives we live, the memories we carry, mould and shape who we are, pulling us forward and backward through time. Are you so eager to cut the tether to your old life, to leave all that behind you? Is that why you accepted my collar?'

Will rubbed at his face. Despite the cool command, the iron clad calm, there was an earnestness to Hannibal's words that set his mind spinning. It had him doubting his anger, his suspicions. Perhaps he wasn't the only one questioning intentions, allegiances. *Trust goes both ways* . Will turned to face Hannibal head on once again, forcing his tone to soften.

'I'm having trouble remembering what life was like before you, but I can remember every moment with you *here,* in this office, with absolute clarity.'

'Memories can sink out of sight, Will, yet we can still be aware of their absence, still regret their loss. Who among us can say we are truly glad to be rid of our past? To step off that cliff towards the new and be forced to choose what of ourselves to leap with, and what to leave behind.'

Will felt his mouth press into a firm line. How to possibly answer? Yet Hannibal seemed willing to accept his lack of response, speaking again with an impossible mix of softness and heat.

'What is it you imagine your place here could be, Will? Between us? I wonder if you would even want what your imagination has woven.'

Hannibal had begun to close the distance between them again, one step after another; his voice was gentle but his eyes roved over Will's face, his body, coming to rest again and again on the collar at his throat.

Will surprised himself with a huff of quiet laughter. 'I will admit, there's a grandiosity to what I've imagined compared to what I know is true.'

'What do you know to be true, Will?'

So close now. Will found himself responding to the heat of Hannibal's gaze; it echoed in him so strongly that it forced him back a step, two. He suddenly found himself with his back against the ladder to the upper gallery, the rungs bumping against his heels, his calves, his ass. He forced himself to straighten, to focus on what he needed to say.

Truth and consequences.

‘I know you gave me this collar, *Sir*, and I know that I want it. I also know that Bedelia was able to shake my belief in it with only a few choice words. The potential of everything I want and everything I’m afraid to want...’ A sigh escaped him as he trailed off, trusting that Hannibal would understand what he couldn’t find the words to say. He could feel the fight draining out of him, need rising in his chest to drown it out. He was right where he needed to be, so why was he pushing so hard?

Are you trying to see just how hard you’d have to push for him to reject you?

But Hannibal was almost on him now, so close. ‘You must overcome these potentialities that are disguising your reality.’ His voice a velvet imperative, ‘Right now, Will, we are here. Right now, my collar is around *your* neck, no one else's.’

Hannibal closed the last shred of distance between them, crowding into him, forcing him back against the ladder. Will sucked in his breath as heat shot up his spine. His head tilted back, body open, neck bared, submitting to the strength of Hannibal’s smouldering command.

‘Right now, Will, you are *mine*.’

Yes.

The part of Will’s brain that was still functioning was aware that they hadn’t truly resolved anything - that, as always, Hannibal had left his most pointed questions hanging, as Will now hung onto the ladder, a sacrificial lamb. But he didn’t care. His response rang in his ears, the *only* response…

‘Yes, Sir.’

A predatory spread of a smile and Will let himself surrender. All the air left his lungs as Hannibal suddenly reached out, hooking one finger through the ring on the collar, pulling their bodies together, pushing Will back against the ladder, the rungs pressing into his back, his shoulders. Will could feel the heat of Hannibal’s body through their clothes, all those layers still between them.

‘Turn around, Will.’ Spoken hot, in his ear. Will’s knees threatened to give out as he felt the tip of Hannibal’s tongue, sharp teeth *just* nipping at his earlobe, teasing, there and gone. Hannibal’s voice purred, ‘Bend over and hold the ladder.’

Will complied immediately, turning to bend over, gripping the rung at eye-height. Couldn’t help the yelp of surprise as Hannibal kicked his feet wider, the sound turning quickly to a moan at the rough treatment. Hannibal paced a slow circle around him, assessing, *claiming*. From the other side of the ladder, Hannibal put one finger under Will’s chin, lifting his head even higher, adjusting the collar so the ring fell perfectly centered. Continuing until Will felt a hand, hot but gentle, pressing down on his lower back, pushing him to arch even more, as far as his hamstrings would allow, ass forced higher…setting him just as Hannibal wanted him.

‘Beautiful, Will. Stay.’

Will could already feel the delicious strain of the overemphasized posture. Fingers gripping the ladder rung, teeth clenched. He tried to relax into it, to bring the grace and elegance he knew would make Hannibal proud. Hannibal had retrieved something from his desk drawer and was back at his side, his warm hand running along the arch of Will’s back, down his flank, easing the tension in his muscles. Will pressed minutely back into the touch, unable to help himself.

Hannibal held up a hand in front of Will's face to show him his instrument for tonight's session: a leather paddle, thick but smooth, no doubt heavy enough to send the shocks of each impact right through him.

'How good you've been for me today.' Hannibal's voice crooned above him, dark and hungry. 'How open. You've worn my collar well, Will. Your place with me is here, now, and ready.'

Will could feel the warmth of pride spreading up his chest, across his cheeks, a heady mix with his mounting need and anticipation, setting his mind spinning, dizzy with it as Hannibal continued.

'And tonight, I want you to *keep* telling me how you feel. What you want. Tonight, I want to hear you, Will.'

'Yes, Sir.'

It was all he could manage. Will's confidence fluttered; he could feel his words deserting him already, breath tight, his cock already so hard it hurt, knuckles white on the ladder rung. Hannibal had never demanded that he speak before in a session, at least not past counting the blows. Will had always been allowed to sink into that deep, nonverbal bliss. This would be a reward and a challenge all at once.

But before he could dwell any more, Hannibal brought the paddle down with a great *crack* against his ass. Just as Will had anticipated, it vibrated through him, the resounding thud loud in the quiet room, offset by the delicate metallic shiver of the ring in his collar, a delicious counternote to the heavy waves of sensation flooding through him. It loosed a pent up moan as he reset his feet for balance, fighting to keep the posture Hannibal expected of him.

But Hannibal was already bringing the paddle down again. And again. Setting up a punishing rhythm, catching Will first on one side then the other: his ass, his thighs. Hannibal's free hand returned to rest on his lower back, a reminder for him to keep the arch he had asked for, almost unbearably gentle in contrast to the paddle as it pounded against him. Will could feel each impact shudder through his cock, and he sucked in his breath, eyes squeezing shut, teeth clenched as he clutched the ladder for balance.

'Let me hear you, Will.'

His voice felt buried in his lungs, trapped behind some wordless animal instinct to hide and just feel. But he would do as he was told. The paddle thudded against him through his pants, a reminder, an imperative to simply listen and obey. Will let his breath out in a long, low, heavy moan, forcing his eyes open, pressing back into the blows, trying to magnify them.

'Ugh. Thank you, Sir. Need this. Need you.' It was all he could manage, a rush of breathy desire.

'Good, Will. Give me more.' Hannibal's tone was hungry, goading him on.

'Oh god, Sir. So good. Please..' Will could already feel heat gathering at the base of his spine as he pushed back harder against the blows, demanding more more *more*.

'Please what, Will?' No falter in that flawless rhythm. Hannibal hadn't let up on him, the paddle coming down again and again in delicious variation.

Will could barely gather his thoughts together, arching back into the blows even as he gripped the ladder rung, Hannibal's command just as strong as any rope could have been - but chasing… chasing something…

'Fuck. Please. Sir. Harder. More.' A staccato of need, punched from him with each blow.

Hannibal obliged him immediately, but only for a few blows, before backing off again. Will found himself all but writhing his ass in the air, chasing sensation, his cock so hard he knew the only thing keeping him together was his nameless desire for *more*.

'Is that what you wanted, Will?' A truly devilish tone, but tight, thick with expectation, spurring him on.

Will heard a growl issuing from his own chest. Purposefully risking his posture, he threw a look over his shoulder. He needed to see Hannibal, needed to see his face. And he was rewarded. Hannibal was flushed, his eyes on fire, willing him, *daring* him…

'Tell me what you need.' Hannibal's voice was a low command, but Will could hear the strain, testing that iron restraint.

Still the paddle slammed into him, thick, hard, heavy, but *dampened* somehow, the cloth of his pants stifling any real sting, the high notes robbed from a symphony of sensation, leaving only the muffled base. It was everything, but it still wasn't enough. Will let out a feral growl of frustration. Hannibal seemed to be almost purposefully blunting the blows, making him work for them, pushing him to speak.

It was enough to force the failing words past his lips, letting them tumble from him in a rush.

'Oh fuck. Please, Sir… Hannibal…I want. I need…. *more*....' It was all he could do before loosing a guttural groan, hoping that his moans were enough, freely offering up his voice as best he could. The cloth of his pants seemed an unbearable barrier now. Between him and the paddle. Between him and Hannibal.

Hannibal suddenly stilled, one warm hand still resting soft on his lower back as Will panted, reeling from the loss of the blows. Hannibal's voice was a dangerous purr.

'Show me.'

An overwhelming rush of gratitude. It had been enough. No longer the necessity to speak, merely to act. Will wasn't even sure what he wanted, only that he could no longer stand the barrier between them. He threw a desperate questioning look back over his shoulder, flexing his hands, seeking permission to move them from the ladder. Hannibal's eyes were bottomless black, pupils blown wide.

'I said show me, Will.' A growl of command.

Will forced his fingers to open, knuckles screaming after gripping the ladder rung. He fought to stay bent over as he'd been told, but locked eyes with Hannibal as he let his hands slowly fall to his belt. A fraction's pause to see if Hannibal would stop him, but he was met only with that blazing fire, saying nothing, ordering nothing, but spurring him on nonetheless.

Fingers clumsy as he fumbled quickly with the buckle, Will shoved his uncertainty aside as he loosed his belt and undid his pants, pushing them and his boxers down in one fluid motion to fully expose his ass. No more barrier. No more lines. No more forts. Hannibal had told him to show him what he wanted, and he had done exactly as he was told.

Suddenly his words didn't seem so far away, his voice clear and strong.

'Please…Sir. I need to feel you.'

He felt more than heard the low growl from the man beside him, more resonant in his gut than even the blows of the paddle had been, dangerous, feral. A heady sense of triumph to breach that cool command. The sound of the paddle clattering to the floor punched a desperate breath from him.

Yes. Please.

In a whirl of strength and surprise, Hannibal suddenly reached forward and, hooking two fingers through the ring on his collar, hauled Will around, pulling him behind him he turned, still graceful, and moved, one step, two, three. In one fluid motion, Hannibal spun to sit on the nearby leather divan, pulling Will down and over his lap, knees catching him neatly, Will's ass in the air, completely exposed, breath punched from his lungs.

Hannibal let go of the collar ring, just as quickly gripping the hair at Will's nape instead, pinning him down, pressing his face into the leather of the couch. Will sucked in a breath as he felt a warm hand, *that* hand, *his* hand, softly glide over his exposed skin, sliding up the back of his thigh, up and over his ass, long and slow, impossibly decadent.

'Is this what you want, Will? Say it.'

No hesitation. 'Oh god, yes, Sir. *Please* . Hannibal. Do it.'

Hannibal wasted no time, palm coming down hard against his skin, and Will's mind blazed white. He couldn't even recognize the sound that was wrung from him as Hannibal began to spank him, his *hand* , his *skin* … Heavy, hard, soft, stinging, all of it bursting through his body and mind like stars made flesh. Finally the full symphony of sensation, exactly what he had been chasing, the full and fierce nuance of delicious punishment and reward all wrapped into one.

Perfection.

Through everything, Will could picture it all in his mind, slung over Hannibal's knee, Hannibal's bare hand against his ass, one hand fisted in his hair, holding him down, the sheer *intimacy* of it all threatening to entirely unmake him and make him anew.

Will's moans were constant now, his cock hurtling him towards the edge already. He tried to hold on, to keep himself from rutting against Hannibal's thigh, but as one perfect blow rained down after another, he knew he couldn't hold out much longer. And Hannibal… the sounds he was making… breath heavy, that low growl building... Will could feel it through his chest, pressed against Hannibal's thighs… It was enough to set him begging for release, even though he never wanted this to end.

'Oh fuck, Sir… I can't… I'm going to come.' Panted out from behind clenched teeth, the *slap* of each impact filling the air.

‘No, Will. You will wait for my word. I’m not done with you yet.’

There were teeth in those words, iron clad but wild. Hannibal’s tone reached inside him and tore something loose. Will’s heart broke open, even as Hannibal’s hand never stilled, his immediate imperative to *obey*, to give Hannibal everything he needed from this, to *be* everything he wanted, gratitude threatening to spill out of him in waves, this chance to *give* temporarily overwhelming his own needs.

‘Mmmm. *Fuck*. Yes, Sir!’

Will squeezed his fists and eyelids closed and willed himself to hold on, to wait for Hannibal’s command, to offer every atom of himself up to Hannibal’s hand, his desires. An animal moan sounded from deep in his throat, his only pressure valve against the pleasure threatening to shake him apart. Will knew his ass must be cherry red, hot and ripe, each beat between slaps thrumming like its own heartbeat, *their* heartbeat.

Will drifted and soared, riding sensation, the singeing heat of Hannibal’s hand his only tether, until Hannibal loosed a guttural cry as his final blows rained down, almost triumphant, as if finally free of a tether of his own. Will could feel himself losing his grip: that sound, Hannibal’s control slipping, it was too much, no matter what his command.

‘So close... *Please…’*

One final mind-shattering *crack* against his ass, and Hannibal was suddenly pulling him up by his hair, only to push him down to his knees on the carpet, Hannibal standing above him, towering, looming, *everything*. Will’s cock was stiff and leaking, jutting before him as he panted to hold on. Hannibal’s expression was ravenous (*beautiful*). Will’s heart leapt at the sight, only to skip again as Hannibal growled out the words he’d been waiting for.

‘Come for me, Will. I want to see you touch yourself.’

‘Oh god… Thank you, Sir!’

Will felt those words as deeply as he felt his release welling up inside him, and not just to *come*. Deep and overwhelming gratitude flooded through him as his eyes locked on the molten blaze of Hannibal’s gaze. His hand had barely wrapped itself around his cock before he came, harder than he ever had in his life, shooting over and over in seemingly endless shuddering spasms, voice cracking and rough around open-throated cries.

He couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see, sucking in air in great gasps, trying to keep his balance, hands reaching out for Hannibal, pawing at his thighs, his hips, his stomach, fingers gripping Hannibal’s waistband for purchase. Will shivered as Hannibal’s fingers tangled tight in his hair, anchoring him, holding him fast as he came back to himself, back to *him*.

But as his breathing slowly returned to something approaching normal, Will realised he could still hear Hannibal’s rough breath, the animal, raw *need* of it. He forced his eyes open, heart both cracking and soaring at the sight…Hannibal obviously hard, chest rising and falling with each heavy breath, lips parted and wet. His eyes were on fire as his fingers gripped even tighter in Will’s hair.

Radiant.

Will didn't think, just let the words tumble from him. 'Please. Sir. Let me.'

He just wanted to give and give and *give* this man everything he could ever want, gratitude burning through him like a brand. His fingers slowly moved down as he held that hard eye contact, tense, as if he were approaching some wild thing with claws and teeth ready and waiting. Will bit his lower lip as he slowly, so slowly, popped the button open with one hand, the other coming up to press hard against Hannibal's thick cock, caged behind fine wool.

Hannibal loosed a moan, fingers tightening in Will's hair, pressing back hard into his palm for a second, two, three… until Will moved to undo his zipper, and… his heart sank as he watched the fire suddenly falter in those blazing eyes, ash eyebrows knitting together... heard the moment when that delicious moan tilted over to a frustrated growl as Hannibal grabbed both his hands, shoving them down and away.

Hannibal turned abruptly away, curling in on himself as he rebuttoned his pants, trying to set himself to rights, shoulders still heaving with the effort of regaining control, breath heavy as he forced rough words between clenched teeth.

'No. Enough, Will … I won't…You don't…'

Will had never in all their time together seen Hannibal at a loss for words; and while something vicious inside him thrilled at it, triumphant that *he* could be the cause of such a thing, devastation still threatened. To be pushed away when he had been so close - to be denied his chance to *give* to this man who had given him so much - it made that thing inside him roll over, rise up, and let loose.

'Dammit Hannibal, look at me!' Will clambered to his feet, voice raised in command of his own, even as his heart hammered in his chest. Hannibal obviously wanted this, why was he denying himself? Denying them?

'I am not going to fuck you, Will.'

It was said so calmly, Will almost couldn't believe it, immediately extinguishing his righteous rage. It knocked him back a step, no less effective than if Hannibal had placed a palm on his heart and shoved. He watched in almost detached fascination as Hannibal turned slowly, impeccable person suit gathering inexorably back around him, reasserting itself, only iron will holding it in place over the barely concealed blaze within. But it was enough. Hannibal didn't waver, and although his tone was tight, raw, his words were clear, undeniable.

'Make no mistake, Will, you have given me all I could have asked for tonight and more. You were… incandescent. Perfect. But I need you to listen to me now. You need to go. I need you to go.' A beat. 'Please.'

With that, Hannibal stepped close to him and reached up, quickly unbuckling his collar. Will flinched as it fell away, cold air hitting his throat as it dropped into Hannibal's hands… hands that had so recently been hot on his skin. Even compared to that first time, the loss of the collar now left him feeling shockingly bereft, entirely and irrevocably unmoored. His mouth opened and closed around half-formed protests, frustrated, confused, angry… but somehow, impossibly, his mind still stuttered around deep and profound thanks, gratitude still washing through him in waves, that undeniable desire to reciprocate, to give Hannibal whatever he might need, to *take* through giving. The duality of his feelings left him utterly lost. He didn't know what to say so Will simply fell back

on what he knew: he did what he was told, forcing himself to straighten, saying the only thing he could, voice alien in his ears…

'Yes, Sir.'

Quickly buttoning his pants with shaky fingers, Will turned to leave, moving towards the office door on legs that didn't seem like his own, mind a careful blank. Still, he allowed himself one look back, needing to see Hannibal's face, desperate for any hint of clarity. And while Hannibal's expression showed only that careful mask of calm Will had seen him use on his patients, his fists were clenched at his sides, and his *eyes*… Will's heart cracked open to see that his eyes were swimming, *haunted*, tracking every move Will made as he walked out the door, slipping like a ghost into the night.

****

He barely remembered getting home, navigating dark stretches of highway like grooves in a record as he replayed every word, every gesture, every *tear*. Fed the dogs with absent murmurings; pulled the previous night's leftover stew from the refrigerator and ate it cold straight out of the container, staring blankly out of the window into unforgiving darkness; undressed with clumsy fingers and left his clothes where they fell; dropped almost instantly into sleep that felt like nothingness, only to wake fitful and sweaty, Saturday dawn seeping watery and weak through his windows, pack crowded around him. Hannibal's words echoing in the quiet.

'I won't… You don't…'

As he sat nursing a lukewarm cup of coffee, Will rolled those words around; explored their edges and hollows; tasted their acidic bitterness.

'I need you to go.'

Such a particular way to phrase it. Such a hunted look…

All through the interminable morning, Will felt eyes upon him, unblinking, toffee-dark. Heard the distant rumbling of velvet commands. If he tried very hard, he could even imagine the weight of Hannibal's collar around his neck. But it was all hollow, all pretence. He was flailing, untethered. No one on hand to tell him what to eat for breakfast (so, peevishly, he had none) or what to wear (he grabbed a two-day-worn Henley and shoved his legs into rumpled cargos) or which tasks to prioritise (*fuck* that loose tile, and the gutters could just wait forever for all he cared).

But there was only so long he could sit and sulk at the piano, tracing ivory, aimless. Wondering what Hannibal was doing and where and with whom… Waiting. *Wanting*.

'Please. Sir. Let me.'

Sir … Hannibal. *God, Hannibal, please, I need you ...*

On and on, thoughts tumbling, emotions unspooling, until Will realised he'd lost most of the day. And by nightfall, the thought that it was still only Saturday (way too many fucking hours left to fill

before Monday morning) - that he would have to endure this *all over again* the next day before getting any answers, any idea of what the hell had happened last night… The very idea of facing an entire Sunday feeling like this finally propelled Will out of the house.

He unlocked the car with hands that still shook. Sat with the engine running, headlights glaring into the gloom of the evening. Mapping multiple outcomes in his head. Anger, rejection (unemployment)... acceptance? And there it was - the tiniest speck of hope. Hope that beneath whatever the hell was holding Hannibal back (*fear?*) ran a seam of need as deep and molten as that which pulsed through Will's veins. That hope spurred him on, pushing him away from the frozen silence of the countryside, back to the lights and noise of the city. But not to the office this time. Instead, Will found himself steering towards an elegant address in an unfamiliar part of Baltimore.

Another three-storey gothic monstrosity. Jesus, Hannibal. Talk about having a type.

Hannibal's home. He knew the address, of course, but before tonight it had remained an abstract, veiled. All cast now in darkness except for one room on the ground floor, long grey curtains slitted, through them a glimpse of teardrop crystals blazing light (*a chandelier; an honest-to-fuck chandelier*). Will huffed a laugh, exhaling exasperation and a terrible, tearing fondness. Palms clammy, he reversed into a spot behind the Bentley, tucked away neatly at the side of the house, and turned off the engine, battling with a sudden rush of nerves, doubt gnawing at his exposed edges

This is absolutely a terrible idea. Saturday night - he's probably hosting a dinner party or something. Shit, what if Bedelia opens the door?

But the house *was* dark, and the idea of not trying - of driving back to his own lonely house when Hannibal was so very close - settled cold and hollow in the pit of his stomach. So Will took one steadying breath, then another. Pushed open the car door and got out.

Followed a neatly-maintained path around to the front of the house, pausing as it loomed over him… a deep, steadying breath and then up a short flight of limestone steps to a set of double doors: walnut, inlaid with pale oak. Will's finger hovered for a moment above the polished bell before he pressed it, instantly stepping back, half-poised for flight.

His thoughts whirled; chaotic, scattered, curling up and blowing like so many dried leaves on the tiled porch. Too late to gather them together with footsteps sounding: sure, firm, *his*.

And then the door was opening and Will's throat constricted as Hannibal stood there, haloed by lamplight, hair falling soft across his forehead, disarmingly casual in a red sweater over a white shirt, open at the throat, casual slacks, and fine wool socks peeking out against the marble floor. In one hand, a half-filled glass of red wine. The entire effect made him seem unnervingly vulnerable, exposed in a way that trapped Will's voice in his throat.

'Will?' Eyes creasing with concern, Hannibal took a step towards him, free hand on the door jamb (*to keep me out?*). 'What are you doing here? Is something wrong?'

The flush provoked by the first question deepened at the second (*What the hell* are *you doing here? What did you expect him to say?)* , and for an agonising few seconds all Will could do was shuffle awkwardly, mouth trying to work around words that failed him. Finally, he just nodded.

Stepping out onto the porch, Hannibal laid a hand on his shoulder; brought it up to cup his cheek, eyes searching his face.

‘Tell me.’

The imprint of long fingers burned through Will’s skin. He exhaled shakily. ‘I just - I wanted -’

You. Missed you. Needed *you*.

He lifted hopeless eyes to Hannibal’s. Fingers tightened to a possessive grip.

‘Will. Answer me.’

‘I’m fine,’ he snapped. Cast a look over Hannibal’s shoulder, at cream walls and a stone hearth, snatches of music (*Bach?*) wafting through an octagonal space. ‘Am I interrupting something?’ His eyes fell to the wine. ‘Do you have company?’ Jealousy edging his words.

Hannibal’s lips tweaked upwards minutely. ‘Apparently I do now.’ His thumb brushed the line of Will’s cheekbone drawing a shudder. ‘And I’m curious what could have compelled you to drive an hour in the dark just to find me.’

Will shrugged, helpless. ‘All day, I’ve felt - I don’t know -’

‘Yes, you do.’ Hannibal’s voice was a comforting rumble, but still edged with command.

‘Lost. I needed -’ a hard swallow, a pleading gaze, ‘direction.’

‘Direction?’ Fingers threaded into the curls at his nape. ‘Is that all?’

‘No.’ Half-closing his eyes, savouring the touch, but steeling himself against what he had to say, what he had to admit. ‘I needed... answers. What the hell happened last night? I was… I don’t know… concerned… about you.’

The slow caress of fingertips stilled. ‘You had no cause to be.’ A layer of cold reserve snapping closed. *Covering the cracks*. Hannibal lifted the glass to his lips.

Will met that affronted gaze head on. ‘No cause to be? Jesus, Hannibal….’ Even through his frustration, Will’s pulse ticked up as he registered the bead of wine on Hannibal’s lower lip. So close. If he were to lean in just a little, flick out his tongue…

‘Will.’ The hoarseness of Hannibal’s voice brought him, blinking, back to himself. A stain of red on high cheekbones, quickened breath on the night air. ‘I think it’s best you leave. We can continue this conversation on Monday.’

‘Dammit, Hannibal. I don’t want to wait until Monday.’ Abandoning caution (*fuck Bedelia and her passive-aggressive warnings*), Will lifted a hand to Hannibal’s cheek, the slight rasp of stubble beneath his palm a beguiling reminder that he was seeing a side to Hannibal he *knew* no one else was allowed to see, his alone. ‘I need you to listen to *me* this time, Hannibal. I want to be with you. I want your collar around my neck. I want your hands on my skin and your voice in my head. Not just at the office, but here, now... every single day. Voice cracking. ‘Please… Sir. You asked me to be yours. So let me *be yours.* ’

The barest beat as Hannibal stood stock still, Will’s words reverberating between them, Hannibal’s expression cycling through countless emotions until he suddenly reared back, pushing away as he hissed out a single word, slashing the air between them.

‘*Stop*.’

And almost before Will could draw a wounded breath, the door was slammed shut between them.

A moment of frozen disbelief. Then an involuntary step forward. Will laid his palms against cold oak, rested his forehead against it. Whispered, broken, ‘Hannibal.’

A gut-wrenching moment of silence before a dim thud, the door juddering slightly. As if… Longingly, Will turned his cheek into the wood, imagining Hannibal mirroring him on the other side. ‘Hannibal.’ Voice aching. ‘Hannibal.’ Forceful this time.

Silence. Resigned, Will finally raised his head to push himself away from the door. But before he could force his limbs to move, to turn away, the door was wrenched open, and Hannibal stood before him, eyes dark with torment.

‘Do you have any idea,’ he ground out, ‘what you do to me?’

And on a relieved sob, Will stepped straight into his arms.

At the first touch of Hannibal’s lips to his, Will’s knees buckled, and he grabbed fistfuls of smooth cashmere. Pulling Hannibal into his body, he let his eyes drift closed, mouth opening to Hannibal’s insistent tongue, warm and wet, grape-sweet, and with a greedy moan Will sucked and bit at him, devouring him right back. The growl that came from deep in Hannibal’s chest was delicious. Will was pushed back against the door frame, Hannibal’s body pressed tightly against him, his jaw cradled between warm palms, truly decadent. Will groaned at the the feel of teeth, biting at his lower lip before Hannibal’s tongue plunged back into his mouth, stealing his breath.

Will returned the kiss with feverish want, with everything he had, finally able to take and give in equal measure. Greedy for the slide of their lips, the sharing of breath, the devouring ardour of a need too long denied. *Mine, mine, mine… Yours, yours, yours.*

When finally they broke apart, Will blinked away surprising tears, hot on his cheeks, heart contracting at the sight of the reciprocal light swimming in Hannibal’s eyes. Hannibal's warm hand reached up to catch salt dampness on his thumb, brought it to his lips and sucked, worshipful. A shiver raced up Will's spine.

What now?

Hannibal’s gaze darkened. ‘Will, I -’

‘Listen... I know. You need… time.’ Husky. ‘I’m going to go.’

A gentle hand brushed the curls out of his eyes. ‘Not too much time.’ A rueful smile. ‘I expect to see you Monday morning, Will Graham.’

A smile, tugging at the corner of Will’s mouth. ‘Should I be sorry? That I pushed?’ Voice shaky but just a hint of the old playfulness toying at its edges.

‘I’m not.’

Will’s stomach flipped at the velvet sensuality of Hannibal’s tone. Leaning in until their lips were almost touching, he murmured, ‘I’m going to go. But I meant what I said before - I want

everything, and I want it with you. But you have to want it too. Trust, remember?' The softest brush of lips before he broke away again. *Please* ...

At the bottom of the path, he turned. Hannibal still stood on the porch, face unsmiling but eyes glittering with promise. A promise that Will desperately hoped would be fulfilled…

Your move… Sir.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter marks the end of Part 2!

After one extra week for us to regroup, Part 3 (the final part!) will start posting on NOVEMBER 25th. Just three more chapters to go Fannibals, so stay tuned and hit that subscribe button!

We're overwhelmed by everyone's amazing support for this fic! You all are the best readers we could ask for. We're so happy you're enjoying this fic, and we love every second of writing it for you ❤️

As always, kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are magical and we thank you for leaving them 🙂

You can find us over on Tumblr at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup. And on Twitter @MyDesignHanibl and @fragile_teacup XO

Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

Another Monday morning...

With everything he's wanted so close he can taste it, Will finds he might not be as patient as he promised. And this time, Hannibal is ready and waiting with plans of his own. 🔥😈

Chapter Notes

Welcome to Part 3 everyone, buckle up! ❤️🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

'

Will swung into his parking spot, wincing at the subtle squeal of tires as he braked hard, slamming the car into park a mere inch from the wall.

He definitely heard that. But at least you got here in one piece.

Will took a deep breath and looked up at the stone facade of the office.

Wonder if you'll leave here in one piece?

He'd half expected to get pulled over on the long drive in from Wolf Trap, his distracted driving likely worse than if he'd downed a half bottle of whisky before venturing out to work. The weight of his foot on the gas seemed to correspond to whatever flip-flopping emotion he'd been riding from moment to moment; that mental rollercoaster making him dawdle one minute, lost in thought (Hannibal's hard length under his palm, the feral fire in his eyes, fingers gripped in his hair… *god, that kiss* …) – only to find himself rage-speeding recklessly the next, reliving the moment Hannibal had sent him away (*I am not going to fuck you, Will…)*.

At least a handful of drivers had swerved out of his way, horns blaring as he'd waved them off, altogether too distracted to even bother being embarrassed.

God knows what Hannibal would say if he saw you driving like this. On Friday he was clucking about how much salt you eat. Plus… rude.

Will waved that thought away too, even though it coaxed a begrudging smile to his lips. They had more important things to work through today than to waste time on a distracted driving lecture. But even that thought had him grumbling.

Maybe if he stopped sending you away every night, you wouldn't have so far to drive.

It was an obvious leap (*He's barely even touched you yet, and now you're spending the night?*) but it was a leap Will was desperate to make. After an entire Sunday spent pacing the fields and forest with his dogs, the chill fall air a sharp counterpoint to the lingering touch of Hannibal's hot breath, his lips, his tongue, his hand… even the stream had failed to quiet Will's traitorous mind as it kept insisting on dissecting everything that had happened between them: each moment, each word, each touch, each lesson, spiraling out over how much *more* he knew they could have…

No, Will was long past pretending he wanted anything less than… well… everything.

'I want everything, and I want it with you.'

Had he really said those words out loud, only two days ago? Will was glad that he had, but it still seemed unreal somehow. The ghost of Hannibal's lips on his own felt like more of a dream than reality. Leading up to it, Will had felt like a ghost himself, disconnected, utterly unmoored after Hannibal had sent him home so abruptly, still reeling from that incredible scene they had shared. Angry, lost and alone, he had finally done the only thing he could think of, following that tether right to Hannibal's home, right into his arms…

And it had felt like *home*.

Even now, lost in a whirl of conflicting thoughts, Will felt that tether draw tight under his ribs, a hook lodged deep in his heart, barbed but beautiful. And while he'd clung to it for months, had grown accustomed to its place inside him, his need of it, Will found he was finally letting himself believe that the tether really did stretch both ways, that his own hook had finally found its mark after all, that each of them had become inextricably bound to the other. Hook, line and sinker.

So why can't you seem to reel him in? Why is he fighting so hard?

That was the dark cloud that had followed Will all weekend. And even now, Will was still completely unsure what the last few days had meant for them… least of all, what it would mean in the harsh light of a Monday morning.

He still felt raw from everything that had happened. The emotional gutting of being summarily dismissed after that spanking had been savage, like he'd been left to bleed out, sliced open, scooped out… but still his skin burned from the mind-shattering intimacy of it all; Hannibal's bare hand on his skin, that delicious command, how Hannibal had thrown him over his knee, the sheer animal power of him, that growl building to a savage cry…

The moment Hannibal's iron control had slipped had somehow been even more decadent than all the rest. *Beautiful* . That *thing* inside Will had thrilled at it, called out to meet its match in heat and fury. He had played that moment over and over in his head, Hannibal's grip tightening in his hair, the hard length of him pushing into Will's palm, the feral look in his eyes like he'd wanted to eat Will alive… it still set his nerves on fire. And that kiss, god, Will could almost taste Hannibal's desire even now, feel the hunger roiling beneath the surface.

'Do you know what you do to me?'

The growl of those words still made sweat prick on Will's skin, thrilled up his spine. Yet Hannibal had sent him away, resisted, pulled back, iron control slamming down around him like a portcullis fashioned from sheer strength of will. It had Will's mind spinning as he stared down the office door, frustration flaring, looking for something, anything, to bite into.

Will knew Hannibal wanted him. Knew it in his bones. He would have to be blind not to have seen the blazing need in those predatory eyes.

And you want him. All of him. So why all this denial?

Will took one last look at himself in the rearview.

Enough. You're not going to find out by sitting in the car. You said you'd give him time. You lied. Now get to work.

Will made himself move quickly, slamming the car door. He took mental stock of himself as he strode forward. He'd made sure his hair was on the attractive side of disheveled, charcoal wool pants with the dark seafoam shirt Hannibal had recently given him – the one he'd said brought out Will's eyes like an ocean storm. Will had laughed off the compliment in the moment, but it had lodged itself inside him, hoarded with all the others, safe and warm and bright. He'd picked out the shirt this morning without hesitation, marveling at how normal it now felt to take pride in his appearance, to use it as a tool, just as Hannibal did. Will knew he looked good.

He unlocked the door and let himself in, his momentum pulling the heavy door closed behind him. He'd get himself settled in first and then…

‘Good morning, Will.’

Fuck.

Will clamped down on his bottom lip to keep the curse from slipping free. *So much for getting a grip.*

He raised his eyes slowly, pulling his bag from his shoulder with a calm, deliberate movement, like there was a wolf in the room. There may as well have been, for there was Hannibal, perched on the edge of Will’s little desk, clearly lying in wait. He was impeccable in that deliciously audacious red-checked suit and paisley tie, an utterly disarming, wicked grin on his face.

‘Good morning… Sir.’ *Don’t let him see you sweat so easily.* Mustering a suggestive smirk, ‘And what can I do for you so early this morning? Clearly you must want something if you’re waiting to ambush me in here.’

The smile spread further, slow and dark like warm honey; the second it reached Hannibal’s eyes, avid and sparkling, Will could feel the knot in his stomach start to let go, relief drowning out some of that insidious doubt. Just to be back here… together.

‘Perhaps I simply looked forward to seeing you, Will.’

Will huffed a genuine laugh. ‘I hope I live to see the day your motivations are ever quite so simple, Hannibal.’

That earned him a tilt of one brow, Hannibal’s grin edging into playfulness as he stood, palms outstretched. ‘Please, Will. Allow me.’ Manners polished to a high shine, only three graceful steps to sweep behind him, fingers brushing his neck as he pulled Will’s coat down and off his shoulders, making him shiver in spite of himself. It was so unexpected, Will needed a beat to recover his voice.

‘Is this what I can look forward to every morning now? One kiss and the tables have turned? My shoes are a little scuffed, too, if you’re interested.’

Those lips, hot against his ear, a dangerous purr wrapped in warm affection. ‘Careful, Will. If you’d rather, I can call all of my patients and tell them their appointments are back on today after all.’

What? He cancelled… all of them?

Will turned abruptly, unsure if he should be excited or suspicious, only to find himself mere inches from Hannibal, caught in his magnetic orbit. Amber eyes searching his face, playful still, but also cautious, guarded. Like he half expected Will to bolt. Will allowed his wary expression to soften, just a little, his tone teasing.

‘Are you suggesting I drove all the way here for no reason?’ Suggestively looked Hannibal up and down, one slow step toward him closing that last bit of distance between them. ‘Or that we have a full day here together, with no patients…Sir?’

Again that decadent, hungry smile. ‘Get on your knees, Will.’

The spike of heat through Will’s gut cut off every half-formed smart remark, his knees already threatening to fold underneath him… but he held Hannibal’s eyes *hard,* not surrendering even an

inch of space as he did as he was told, sliding his body down Hannibal's torso as went to his knees, keeping his head tilted up *just* enough that he could almost feel the outline of Hannibal's cock beneath his upturned chin.

'Good boy.' Hannibal's eyes burned with hungry pride. 'Now, first things first…'

Will's collar, produced from Hannibal's pocket. Will closed his eyes and tilted his head up as his tie was loosened, top buttons undone, throat exposed, savouring the warmth of Hannibal's fingers on his skin, the feel of the smooth leather, perfectly formed now to his neck from wear, the chill of the buckle, the ring, all of it familiar, a deep relief settling into his bones.

He didn't try to hide the soft sigh that escaped him as Hannibal stepped back to look him over. Will opened his eyes slowly, drinking Hannibal's smouldering approval like he was dying of thirst.

'I found myself feeling… rather generous today, Will. Perhaps selfishly so. I didn't want either of us to have to wait through an endless string of patients for what I have in store for you.'

Will swallowed at the insatiable tone, breathing shallow, cock stirring. But he wouldn't give all his ground so easily.

'It must be some kind of plan if you don't need me to get your coffee for you.' Mustered a smirk. 'And what about your pencils?'

Hannibal smirked right back. 'Already taken care of, Will. After all, you would require the use of your hands for those tasks, and I don't believe I'll be granting you that this morning.'

'What…' The jolt up Will's spine caused his breath to hitch. But Hannibal merely gave him a dark smile, cutting off his words with a finger pressed to his lips. Will had to resist the urge to open his mouth and suck it down…

'Stand up, Will. Into the office. No more questions. And you'll watch that lovely mouth of yours, now. I may be feeling generous today, and my *indulgence* of you never fails to surprise me… but even it has its limits.'

Something inside Will purred and preened, rolling over inside him, making his cock twitch again. He did as he was told, trying not to look too eager as he sauntered into Hannibal's office, pushing his luck enough to throw a single suggestive glance back over his shoulder, finger to his lips, making sure he was being followed.

Hannibal was right on his heels, cool command radiating from him in waves. Jacket already off, deft fingers rolling up his shirtsleeves in that way that never failed to set Will's mind racing. When he caught Will's look, Hannibal pointed straight ahead of them to the desk, cocking a wicked eyebrow as Will caught sight of the coiled length of rope that lay upon it.

'Shoes, pants and shirt off, Will. Undershirt too. Quickly now.'

Blood rushed in Will's ears. Hannibal's tone brooked no argument, left no room for hesitation or questions. Off balance he might have been, their usual routine pulled out from under him so unexpectedly, but he knew deep inside that it was exactly what he had needed this morning. Even the whirling doubt of the last few days evaporated under the force of the sudden rush of gratitude he felt that Hannibal had known just what to do with him.

Or is this just a distraction… to take the focus off him*?*

Will pushed that last insidious thought aside. He didn't want it poisoning the thrill of this moment; undressing under Hannibal's exacting gaze, the rope coiled now around his palm, licking through his fingers as he watched every move Will made. Will remembered the first time that rope had made an appearance, felt the same anticipation, the same *tension*, mounting inside him as he laid his clothes aside.

He forced smoothness into his movements, grace, giving Hannibal the sight he so obviously wanted to see. The room was silent but for the rustle of cloth, the quiet flick of rope, and the delicate metallic clink of the ring at Will's throat; the world holding its breath.

Finally, Will slid his pants down and off, leaving him in nothing but his boxers. Hannibal had pulled his chair back from the desk as he'd watched, toying with Will's tie and belt that were draped over the back of it. He motioned for Will to stand before the desk.

As soon as Will had done as he was told, Hannibal moved in on him, setting to work immediately; the rope once again measured and pulled, woven and knotted around his shoulders, his waist, his chest, coming up through the ring at his throat to frame him in symmetry. Will tried to remain pliant, forcing himself to soften, to let Hannibal turn and move him as he saw fit. He could hear Hannibal's breathing as he worked, how it quickened imperceptibly; felt the heat of him against his bare skin as he pulled his knots snugt, binding Will tightly so he could let go.

'Arms behind you, Will. Shoulders back. Grasp your elbows.'

As Will followed the command, Hannibal reached around him from both sides, crowding into him, pulling Will's forearms together behind him, forcing his chest out, shoulders back, briefly gripping both of Will's wrists together in a single strong hand. Will let out a groan that earned him a small but satisfied smile before Hannibal turned him around and bent him slightly over the desk, looping the rope around Will's forearms and wrists, binding them together as one, deliciously tight. As Hannibal worked, Will felt himself cast adrift on a sea of sensation, every movement, every touch, every pull - relief and anticipation melding into one single imperative.

Yes. Please.

A series of tugs on different parts of the harness and Hannibal turned Will back around to get a good look at his work, seemingly satisfied… *more* than satisfied if the hungry look in his eyes was any indication. Will couldn't help but pull subtly at his bonds, testing their limits, their strength, toying with that edge of nerves he felt every time he realised he was in no position to do anything except surrender. Hannibal watched him, allowing his brief struggle, but there was a shadow moving behind his eyes, dimming the flame of satisfaction… until with an almost imperceptible nod of his head, something was decided. Hannibal reached out, brushing a curl back from Will's forehead, the gentle touch sending shivers through him.

'I want you to choose two words, Will. Two words you would remember even when everything else is gone. One for slow and one for stop.'

Stop? Don't stop. Never stop.

'What? Why, Sir?'

Sudden confusion, voice faltering. His eyes searched Hannibal's face, watching as his expression turned soft, voice almost earnest, as if he had briefly hit pause, needing to be heard and understood.

'Something I should have done with you long before now, Will. Something I have never bothered to do with anyone else…' Almost to himself, '...never cared enough to.'

But just as quickly as it had appeared, any hint of vulnerability was extinguished, Hannibal's eyes locking back on him as he straightened, cool command slamming back in place.

'Safe words, Will. You will choose one for slow and one for stop. Words you will remember and use without fear or judgement from either of us. Words I will…' a sudden, revelatory raise of his eyebrows, as if he had only just realised the truth of the words he was about to utter, '...words I will heed without hesitation. Immediately and with no repercussions. Choose now, Will. Make them simple.'

Will almost couldn't speak, questioning deep in his gut whether there was *anything* Hannibal could throw at him that he wouldn't want… but the offer, the singular care behind it left Will brimming with sudden emotion. Held snug in Hannbal's bonds, his heart a tight knot of its own…

Never cared enough to…

A lesson in care.

'Yellow and Red, Sir.'

He answered quickly, mustering steadiness into his voice, surety, willing Hannibal to feel just how ready he was for whatever it was he wanted to do to him, for him, *with* him. How much he wanted it all.

Hannibal searched his face, and Will caught the very second he chose to believe him, to trust, the brief flash of relief, just as quickly whisked behind that veil of calm command. But it was enough for Will to understand that perhaps the words were as much for Hannibal's benefit as for his own.

Hannibal reached out, cupping Will's jaw, thumb sliding over his lower lip, dipping briefly inside.

'Good.'

Trussed up and ready, a spike of heat shot up Will's spine as he watched those eyes rove again over his body, rekindling to a blaze, that *thing* inside Hannibal pushing back to the fore, echoing inside Will as fingers gripped harder in his hair, that voice a dark promise.

'One more addition, I think. Before we begin.'

Hannibal didn't break eye contact as he reached for something on the desk behind Will, crowding him back against it, the edge of the wood biting into the tops of his thighs, the crease under his ass. Hannibal held up a small black box, opening it to reveal…

Oh fuck.

A set of clamps, each attached to the other by a delicate length of silver chain. Will shivered, a ripple of understanding sliding under his skin. The idea of them, to be so on display, adorned, unable to use his hands, no way to remove them himself… the idea was wicked and decadent all at once.

Hannibal waited a breath, eyes hovering in brief question, clearly curious whether Will would use his new-found words already. Will forced a coy smile, peering through his lashes.

‘Is there an opposite word to Red…Sir?’

Again that predatory smile, brimming with pride. Hannibal licked his lips. ‘You are always allowed to beg, Will.’

He trailed a finger down Will’s chest, over each tight knot, circling around one nipple, already peaked, teasing. Will’s breath caught, shoulders straining at the ropes as he fought to stay still. When Hannibal pinched, squeezing and rolling the sensitive nipple between thumb and finger, Will let out a keening noise he didn’t even recognize as his own voice.

When the clamp eventually replaced Hannbial’s fingers, the cold bite of it, Will had to fight hard not to collapse against Hannibal’s chest, muscles jerking, breath heavy, as Hannibal repeated the entire process on the other side, taking his time. When he was done, Will’s cock was demanding, hard and full, jutting against his boxers as he panted to stop himself from squirming, to accept the flood of sensation.

Hannibal stood back to look at his prize. Will could feel the chain shivering against his chest, the delicate metallic notes highlighting every twitch and shudder: on display, flayed open under Hannibal’s penetrating gaze.

‘Beautiful.’

Warmth rushed through Will’s chest. Hannibal reached forward, slowly gathering up the chain in one hand, pulling, *twisting* it in his fist, clamps biting with each tug as he pulled Will towards him. A heavy groan burst from behind Will’s clenched teeth, his eyes rolling closed, that bright thread between them almost visible in his mind, a white hot line from his chest to Hannibal’s fist, connecting them.

A deep shudder rippled through him as he felt Hannibal’s other hand come up… *just* brushing a thumb over one clamped nipple, even that whisper of touch like a brand, weakening his knees, making his cock jump. His shoulders strained harder at the bonds, as if he could reach out and grip Hannibal for balance. But he was right there, so close, and Will knew he wouldn’t let him stumble.

‘...god… thank you, Sir.’ Already a rush of gratitude. It sprang from his lips before he even knew what exactly he was thanking Hannibal for. So many things.

Will opened his eyes to watch the fire kindle on those fine features, genuine pleasure there. Hannibal stepped closer still, Will pressed tightly against his chest, nipples singing as they brushed against the fine wool of Hannibal’s vest. Hannibal leaned in close, nose tracing up the column of Will’s throat; a deep, shameless inhale, dark tone once again hot in his ear.

‘You smell like need, Will.’

Will loosed a wordless moan as Hannibal’s thigh pressed slowly into his erection, back arching as his body shuddered, suddenly acutely aware of his bound hands, unable to touch himself even with permission… completely at Hannibal’s mercy…

‘Please…’ Ground out, voice rough in his throat.

‘I told you, you are always welcome to beg, Will. I suspect you’ll be doing much more of it before I’m through with you.’ Pushing harder against him… just a hint of teeth at his ear… ‘But first things first. I want you warm for me.’

Will didn’t have a second to question before Hannibal pulled back, dragging the chain deliciously taut as he went, Will’s groan ratcheting up as he was tugged forward, only for Hannibal to suddenly drop it and flip Will around, throwing him over the desk. The chain rattled against polished wood as it pooled under him, the chill against his hot skin singing with the bite of the clamps. Hannibal gripped his bound wrists, manhandling him into position, pushing him down, kicking his feet wider apart. A sudden flash in Will’s memory, the rough treatment, the ladder… a sudden spike of need, desperate for the feel of Hannibal’s skin on him, to repeat that incredible spanking, to know in his bones it would not be the only time…

‘Oh god, yes… please.’ It was all he could manage, hot cheek pressed into the cool wood of the desk.

Hannibal’s grip tightened like a vice around his bound wrists, pushing into the small of his back, accentuating the arch. The other hand dragged down his side, palm tracing from his shoulder all the way along his flank, feeling, owning. Finally, Hannibal grasped Will’s hips, thumbs pressing bruises into the dimples at his lower back, swiping to dip beneath the band of his boxers.

Again a subtle pause, a question given a breath of space.

‘Please, Sir.’ Will’s voice an emphatic whisper.

He let out a shuddering sigh as Hannibal slowly slid his boxers down and over his ass, fingers dragging on his thighs. Hannibal pulled the boxers much lower than the last time, but didn’t remove them entirely; instead he left them tight around Will’s shins, yet another binding. There was something deliciously debauched about it, making Will feel even more exposed than if he had been standing there fully naked.

He was panting now, straining at the ropes, hips twitching as his exposed cock felt the cool air, already seeking contact. But strong hands pulled him slightly away from the desk. Will could feel the wool of Hannibal’s pants against his skin, the torturous closeness tipping Will’s heavy breathing into a low groan.

‘You know better than to let yourself touch this desk, Will. Squirm all you want, *beg* all you want, but you will not let yourself come. Not until I say.’

The mind-shattering *crack* of Hannibal’s hand against his ass cut off any reply, any thought in Will’s mind, pure blinding relief flooded his veins, vibrating under his skin. Successive slaps followed quickly, one after the other, heavy, stinging, *perfect*. Hannibal’s hand caught him over and over, one side then the other, not sparing the backs of his thighs, the delicate crease under his ass, again and again and again, skin against skin, until Will’s mind was spinning and all he could do was try to keep from rutting against the desk, the cherry-red pain in his ass and thighs and nipples transforming into something… other… something beautiful and cruel and devoted all at once.

Will sank into it, his moans rhythmic, swimming in sensation. And even as he strained at the ropes, Will felt his body opening to Hannibal’s hand, offering himself up, an eager sacrifice to each and every blow, willing Hannibal to know just how much he belonged to him.

‘Ah, yours!’ The word pulled from him unprompted. ‘Oh god, Hannibal… Yours.’

The sound from the man behind him made every hair on his body stand up on end. Even as each crack of his palm never faltered, the growl that resonated from deep in Hannibal's chest threatened to unmake every cell in Will's body, every molecule inside him responding to whatever that *thing* was that lived inside them both, that sought to rip and rend and tear, that longed to devour, to devastate. No matter how perfect Hannibal's iron command, Will ached for the moments when it *slipped*, the veil parting just enough, revealing a dark glimpse of what stalked underneath…

One last resounding crack and Will's moans reverberated off the office walls. Red and raw and blissful, his body was on fire, his cock throbbing, so hard it only added to the pain and pleasure pumping through his veins.

'Please, Sir…' Will didn't know what to beg for, but he did it anyway.

Hannibal had made it clear he couldn't come just because he asked to, clearly wasn't done with him yet, but Will knew the sound of his need would please him, desperate for him to know just how far gone he already was.

'Stand up, Will. Face me' Voice rough but clear, dominating.

Will's face, already burning, flushed even harder. *So exposed* . But he did as he was told, shoulders straining at the ropes as he raised his chest to stand, chain rattling against the desk as he gathered himself and turned, chest heaving, every breath enhancing the bite of the clamps, reasserting their presence. Will lowered his eyes to the floor, cheeks and ass burning as he half-sat on the desk for balance, both likely just as red as his cock, standing hard and undeniable before him. His hands and arms instinctively pulled at the rope in a useless attempt to shield himself from that incisive stare.

'Look at me, Will.'

Will couldn't help but obey, every syllable dripping with unyielding command. Hannibal's eyes were pure fire, whatever leash that held that thing inside him at bay clearly straining at its bonds. Will's cock twitched obscenely, and from the corner of his eye he could see the wetness at its tip. Hannibal once again gathered up the chain in his fist.

Will keened. 'Oh god, please… Sir...'

'Please? What?' A question and a command all at once.

Everything everything everything…

Everything in him wanted to respond, but fear crouched in the shadows. To ask now and be denied again... Will moaned in place of an answer.

'I asked you a question, Will.' The purr was deadly, undeniable, reaching down inside him to rip the words from his soul.

'Touch me! Hannibal… *please*... I need you to touch me!'

Hannibal didn't hide the deep breath he took before one last deliberate step, closing the final distance between them, eyes falling to Will's lips. Suddenly Will was wrenched forward into a crushing kiss, chain and clamps pulled tight. Hannibal's tongue plunged into his waiting mouth, claiming, owning him completely. Will felt like he would melt from the heat of him, his world narrowing to Hannibal's mouth and the insistence of his cock, more than willing to be devoured

completely, this kiss somehow deeper than the first: hungrier, darker, heavy with need. Will could feel his body losing control, gave every inch of it over to Hannibal's ravenous kiss, broken only for the growl against his lips.

'You may *not* come.'

When he felt Hannibal's hand slide down his belly and grip his cock, Will let loose a wordless, half-wild cry against Hannibal's lips, relief like a wave threatening to drown him. He bit down on his own lips as he fought the burning swell that leapt from the base of his spine; the only thing saving him from exploding immediately was that unyielding tone, Hannibal's control holding him just as tightly as his fist as it began moving, twisting, sliding in Will's own wetness. Slow, decadent, building faster, so tight, Will panted and grunted and keened, knowing his sounds were wild and savage and not caring for one second as he felt himself careening towards the edge.

'Uuuugh… *fuck*. Sir, please… I can't!'

Hannibal's hand was suddenly gone, his lips on Will's once again, controlling Will's racing breath with his mouth, tongue licking into him, slow, deep and all-consuming.

'Breathe, Will.' Pushing him down so that Will lay back on the desk, bound hands underneath him; his body forced to arch, exposing him even more, but allowing his failing, shaking muscles a desperate reprieve from holding him up.

Hannibal's fist was still wrapped around the chain, pressing into his chest, holding him down, voice soothing. 'Good, Will. Breathe. Good boy.'

But no sooner had Will panted his way back to some semblance of control than Hannibal pinned him with his eyes, making sure Will watched as he licked a long, slow stripe up his own palm, wetting his fist, then moving to grip him again, fisting his cock in long, wet, indulgent pulls. Will was quickly writhing on the desk, the fist that held the chain pressing down hard enough against Will's chest to bruise as his moans filled the room once again.

'You will wait for my word, Will.'

Will could only groan in response, words deserting him as his whole body shook, his entire being shattering, breaking and reforming as Hannibal again brought him right to the edge and then stopped, pulling him back…

And then did it *over and over, again and again*. A seemingly endless cycle of stimulation and denial.

The edge became Will's entirety, no longer able to do anything but surrender to the mercy of Hannibal's undeniable control, denial becoming just another part of the all-consuming bliss, the blur of sensation. Delicious pain. Torturous pleasure. True submission like he'd never known it, whole and entire. That iron tone in his ear, commanding, goading, coaxing him, resonating to the very core of his being, nothing in the world but *him him him him*.

'You come to me for control, Will. And that's what I'll give you… take from you.'

Will's body was slick all over, shaking. Hannibal had produced a bottle of lube from the desk drawer, minutes, hours, *days* ago, and Will no longer understood how he was holding on, he simply surrendered to Hannibal's will. Hannibal seemed to know exactly when Will was about to lose his

grip, his whole body beginning to buck and shudder, moans shifting to full throated pleas… and each time, he would pull him back from the edge, just as Will's body teetered over the abyss of release. Lost as he was, some deep place in Will's heart sang in gratitude that Hannibal never let him fall, never let him fail, not after all this time, all this *denial*; that he wouldn't let him lose even one second of this.

Control in release. Release in control.

Will was panting once again, sweat beading and dripping, muscles trembling. The very idea of the mess they had made of the desk had his over-sensitive cock twitching again, the *exception* Hannibal had made of him...

Hannibal hummed his approval as he registered that twitch, Will's readiness, and this time when he started again, Will could feel the tension mounting between them, thrumming off Hannibal in waves. Hannibal's eyes roved over him, pinning him down, devouring his every move, every twitch, every sound like he was living for them, *from* them. He moved slowly at first, sliding from root to tip, twisting, dipping around his balls, speeding up and gripping harder until Will's moans became a whimper, panted through clenched teeth.

'Look at me, Will.'

Will flicked his eyes up to Hannibal's face, willed himself to focus. What he saw was beautiful, tension and grace warring on sculpted features, yet still that iron control was absolute, almost as if Hannibal was testing *himself* just as much as Will. Will's cock leapt in Hannibal's hand as he watched his lips pull back just enough to reveal sharp teeth, a snarl of desire behind each word.

'When I take the clamps off, you may come. But not one second before.'

Will merely groaned in response, already hurtling towards orgasm, but he knew he could no more come without permission than he could stand up and walk out, the idea utterly unthinkable. Hannibal sped up once again, faster and faster, knowing just how to play Will's body, all the little ways that sent him careening towards his finish. Hannibal's palm came up and over the head of his cock, thumb pressing at that point just under the ridge on the way down…

'Please please please please…' Will begged, unashamed and unabashed.

'Tell me again, Will. Who do you belong to?'

'Oh god… Hannibal. Yours. I'm yours!'

Again that growl. Hannibal's pace was unrelenting until he suddenly released the chain, letting it pool to Will's slick chest, the movement singing through his nipples. Hannibal leaned down closer, licking a broad stripe up Will's neck, tasting him, tasting his need, every inch the predator scenting his prey.

Will could smell the desire on Hannibal's skin, so close, lips hovering at his ear. Again he keened a wordless plea, his mind a shattered wreck, Hannibal's voice reverberating through him.

'Mine!'

What happened next seemed to happen all at once, Hannibal's voice rough at his ear, inside his head, inside his heart…

‘Come for me, Will.’

Quick fingers moved to release one clamp, the other immediately after, rubbing and pinching at each freed nipple as his other fist gripped tight around Will’s cock.

Oh god.

The rush of blood and sensation shot through him, radiating out from his nipples to his entire body, an electric current building, pooling, concentrating where Hannibal’s skin met his own. Open-throated cries were wrenched from his ravaged throat as Will’s entire body shuddered, coming harder and longer than seemed possible, like he might break apart, shaking in Hannibal’s grip as his orgasm rolled through him, wave after wave, into and over Hannibal’s fist, grip still tight and pulsing with him…

But even as the last spasm shuddered through him, Will tried to focus, eyes rolling to watch Hannibal. He needed to *see*... and he was rewarded. Hannibal’s face was a revelation, that *thing* just barely veiled behind flushed cheekbones and a flaming gaze, somehow feral and worshipful all at once. His hair had come loose, strands falling over his brow, damp as Will’s own. Hannibal’s chest heaved with heavy breath, his cock hard and obvious, caged inside his pants.

As Will watched, Hannibal brought his hand, slick with Will’s spend, up to his mouth, his eyes only leaving Will’s as they rolled closed, licking deeply from his palm, tongue gathering every drop from his fingers, a deep shudder wracking him as a low, proprietary growl rumbled in his chest.

If Will had had anything left in him, he would have come again. Even that mind-shattering orgasm couldn’t quench the bright flare of heat that shot straight through him, the aftershocks that shuddered through his body at that wanton, predatory sight.

But Will could only lie limp and gasping on the desk, wrung out, cracked open and panting, watching in dark fascination as Hannibal once again pulled the cloak of his control back around himself, visibly leashing the beast within, eyes closing, chest heaving with a single, deep, steadying breath, hands curled into fists at his sides, even as he continued to lick his lips… When he finally opened his eyes, the animal blaze had been contained. In its place, Hannibal’s eyes brimmed with attentive pride as he looked immediately to Will, full of a feeling that Will’s heart wouldn’t dare put a name to, a feeling that he knew echoed deep inside himself.

Will’s heart suddenly felt too big for his chest. He instinctively tried to reach out for Hannibal, only remembering the ropes as they bit into his shoulders and arms, still trapped beneath him, only *just* beginning to flirt with numbness. Just as before, Will longed to touch him, to *do* something for him, to *claim him right back*. But all he could manage was a quiet groan, closer to a whimper in his ringing ears, altogether too wrecked to even move. He could feel himself collapsing, exhausted, raw, every muscle starting to tremble.

Hannibal wasted no time – gathering Will in his arms, taking his weight completely to slowly sit him up, quickly working to free him from the knots, the rope left to coil to the floor. Soft eyes and softer hands inspected every inch of him, fingers gently massaging feeling back into his limbs, checking each of the rope marks, every so often a kiss bestowed on a welt like an offering, both received and given.

Will’s heart trilled in his chest at each touch, each ministration, the careful catch of his eyes. Will gripped tight to their tether as wave after wave of feeling crashed through him, edying around his heart, pooling in his gut with each subsiding aftershock and gentle touch. He felt utterly pliant,

basking in gratitude and Hannibal's attention, his *comfort*, letting him gently turn him this way and that as he checked him over, murmuring in his ear the whole time; an endless stream of quiet endearments and praise that called Will back to himself, back to *him*.

'So good for me, Will. So beautiful. My Will. My boy. So brave. So *radiant*. Such beautiful submission… You let me break you, now let me put you back together. Come now, just breathe. I'm here. I have you. You're mine. All you have to do is be here… with me.'

At that last, Will felt the sob that had been building at the back of his throat finally break free. Overcome, overwhelmed, hot tears pricked at the backs of his eyes. He hadn't realized how deeply he had needed to hear those words, to feel this… whatever it was. After what had happened the last time… after what had just happened between them, he couldn't even fathom the idea of leaving, of being separated: even just going about his regular routine in a different room seemed impossible. The tether felt so tight between them, Will thought it would rip his heart from his chest if Hannibal so much as left his side.

If he told you to go…

Suddenly that disconnected ghostly feeling that only days ago had dragged him from Wolf Trap to Hannibal's door in the middle of the night suddenly made all the sense in the world.

This. He had needed *this*. And even in the midst of this symphony of comfort and bliss and belonging, Will felt a dissonant spike of anger shoot through him… for the Will who had been thrust out into the cold that night, for the Will that had been forced to follow the tether back alone, broken and lost, when *this* could have been his all along. A dark thread woven into his rush of emotions, all of them surging and crashing through him at once. Will could feel himself shying away from it all, anger pulsing dark and insistent, chasing him inside himself.

As if Hannibal could sense it, his minute withdrawal, he reached out to cup Will's cheek, tender but firm, forcing Will's eyes to meet his own.

'Don't go inside, Will. You'll want it, as the glint of the rail tempts us when we hear the approaching train. Stay with me.'

Hannibal's words wrenched a sound from Will that was half sob, half ironic laugh. He buried his face in Hannibal's throat until finally the shuddering of his body started to subside, his raw voice finally coming unstuck from his throat.

'Where else would I go?'

Will tried not to think about it, just sighed and melted as Hannibal pressed a soft kiss to his forehead, didn't protest when Hannibal actually scooped him up, one arm behind his shoulder, the other under his knees, lifting him from the desk and carrying him towards the divan. He simply laid his cheek on Hannibal's chest and breathed in the scent of him, knowing deep down down that he never wanted to be anywhere else. Slowly, his breathing started to come back under his control, every cell in his body heavy with gratitude, that impossible closeness thrumming between them.

Home.

Will could feel that Hannibal wasn't fully hard anymore, but he could still smell the need on him, animal and insistent. It kicked a surprising, albeit lazy, roll through Will's gut as he pressed his face deeper into Hannibal's throat, carried along, relishing the subtle scratch of stubble against his

cheek. And while he felt Hannibal's throat hitch and swallow against his lips, the subtle rumble he'd coaxed, Hannibal simply set him gently on his feet in front of the divan, just long enough to pull up Will's boxers and tug his white undershirt over his head, keeping one hand on him at all times, eyes still roving over him intently.

Hannibal maneuvered him to sit, a blanket produced from only an arm's length away and draped over his shoulders, a glass bottle of water pressed into his hands and up to his lips, a silent insistence that he drink deeply. Satisfied, Hannibal pulled him tight against his side, softly rubbing Will's arms through the blanket as his shivering finally stopped, his breathing quiet once again, finally coming back together.

You let me break you, now let me put you back together.

But why?

With all Will's defences in tatters, forts lying in crumbled pieces around him, that thought had come calling once again, insidious… and perhaps the most insidious of all…

Why now*?*

What is it you want, Hannibal?

Questions that carried so much weight, like they might drag him under. It wasn't only this new, almost tender care-giving, the safe words, Hannibal's touch after so much aching denial. It was all those things, but it was also Hannibal's continued *resistance.* It set Will's mind on edge; that flat denial of his own pleasure or release, his white-knuckled insistence on pulling *himself* back from the brink, each and every time, the leashing of that radiant and vicious thing inside him, as if each scene they shared was Hannibal's test of his own control.

And yet here Will sat, wrapped in his comforting arms, soaked in sweat and too much emotion. And as much as he desperately longed to just let himself collapse into it, into him, to finally allow himself the comfort of satisfaction, instead that dark part of his mind just couldn't shake the insidious kernel of anger those questions had kindled. He could feel it growing inside him, a spark threatening to blaze over, whispering to him that he could have had this all along, and that no matter what had just happened between them, it still wasn't enough.

You said you wanted everything*, and you meant it. But… You don't just want it for yourself, you want it for him too.*

It was so hard to push away from Hannibal's chest, but Will made himself do it anyway, needing to look him in the face. He forced his voice to work, still rough, still too disoriented to be anything other than blunt. It was a messy cut.

'Hannibal… I.' Vague gestures at their closeness, the blanket, at Hannibal himself, still doting. 'What is this? What are you doing?'

Was it hurt or surprise that tarnished that worshipful expression? There and gone like a shadow over the sun, but Will caught the rare hesitation before Hannibal spoke, the caution that crept into his eyes, the foreign doubt in his voice.

'I… Would you rather I stop, Will? Do you want to be alone?'

‘No!’ A little too forceful, a little too desperate, but Will couldn’t bring himself to care, hands fisting at the front of Hannibal’s shirt, his anger not nearly enough to eclipse his need to remain close. Tried to soften his tone, couldn’t. ‘No. This is… I need this…’ Again that jolt of anger, accentuating every word, even as his voice cracked around them. ‘Dammit Hannibal, I *needed* this.’

Hannibal stiffened against him. Tension ratcheted up in Will’s chest as he felt sure he would pull away, shut down, maybe even send him away… only to melt into warm relief when Hannibal simply pulled Will even tighter against him, a kiss pressed onto the top of his head, lingering, earnest… almost like an apology. Will gave himself a moment to breathe into Hannibal’s embrace, gathering the courage for what he knew he needed to say, to ask – still, not wanting to, but like a fracture in need of resetting, he knew it needed to be done. This time his voice was calm, spoken into the warm space shared between them.

‘Why now, Hannibal? Where was all this before?’

Hannibal let out a small sigh, his breath warm against Will’s hair, giving his arm one final comforting squeeze before slowly starting to sit up, reinforcing just enough space to talk, his movements incremental enough to gauge Will's responses, his readiness.

Will could feel the tension thrumming in the air as they eyed each other. He pushed himself even further back, letting the blanket fall from his shoulders, needing distance of his own for what he knew could no longer be avoided. This suddenly felt like a reckoning, one of his own design, that fiery kernel urging him on, like it could smell blood in the air. Hannibal’s expression was inscrutable. Will knew his face probably looked the same.

‘I told you I was feeling generous today, Will.’ Hannibal had forced a certain levity into his tone, but Will could hear the strain behind it, the wariness.

Despite everything he was pushing for, Will already longed for familiar ground. Too raw, too *exposed*, he missed his forts. He huffed a low sigh and forced his own wry edge into something he hoped resembled their usual banter. ‘Christ, Hannibal, if you’re in the mood for giving, how about an actual goddamn explanation for once? Not that I didn’t appreciate the blanket.’

Hannibal actually let out a dark chuckle at that, and Will could feel the knot in his heart loosen, *just* a little, just enough to let some air back into his lungs.

‘A rare gift indeed.’ But the moment of humour quickly passed, a dark shadow moving behind Hannibal’s eyes as they cut hard to Will’s. ‘One I can’t imagine you’d truly want.’

Ready anger spiked again in Will’s veins, confusion eddying in his gut.

‘Wouldn’t I?’ Again Will forced the knife-edge out of his tone, mustering the hint of a wry smile. ‘You don’t think I’d want a peek behind that veil Bedelia so generously warned me about… *Doctor Lecter*?’

The old title did its job, coaxing a dry grin as Hannibal dropped his eyes, a little of the tension syphoning off. But still, hot anger bubbled just beneath the surface of Will’s skin; he could feel that *thing* inside him mounting behind his eyes, out for blood and demanding its reckoning. He wouldn’t let Hannibal escape this room without one.

Will allowed the bite back into his words. ‘You *owe* me an explanation, Hannibal. If it’s a gift, I want it. But I’ll take it from you regardless.’

Hannibal blinked, eyebrows raised at Will’s tone, the darkness in it, the caged brutality. Was that pride? Amusement? Arousal? An echoing violence? So much swirled between them, Will couldn’t make sense of it all. But Hannibal mustered himself once again, standing up slowly, righting his vest and tie, running fingers through his hair, pushing it back from his face.

Briefly, Hannibal reached down to brush a still-damp curl from Will’s forehead, eyes searching his face, as if trying to catalogue someone he may not ever see again. Will’s heart throbbed with a sudden ache, his anger stumbling.

'Hannibal… I… Sir…’

Hannibal pressed a soft finger to his lips, gently stopping his words, a subtle shake of his head. Instead he simply gestured to the two patient chairs across from them.

‘Please…’

Manners still impeccable as he motioned for Will to sit. Not an order, but a request, an *invitation*, the implication clear. Hannibal was simply asking Will to come to the table; not as his boy, but as himself, to enter the arena as equals. Even so, Will was quietly grateful Hannibal didn’t suggest removing his collar.

Will rose on legs that still held a slight tremor, but moved to sit with as much grace as he could muster. He could feel the surety gathering around him, the readiness for whatever came next. No more waiting. No more games.

Everything.

They sat across from each other, postures mirrored, legs crossed at the knee, hands poised on the arms of their respective chairs, both open and closed at once. There was a breath when they simply looked at each other before Hannibal spoke, his voice like smooth velvet once again.

‘Do you know what an imago is, Will?’

Will shook his head and couldn’t help the smile tugging at the corner of his lips. Familiar ground. He would play along. ‘It’s a flying insect.’

‘It’s the last stage of a transformation.’

‘When you become who you will be?’ A sudden recognition.

I have become.

A slow nod from Hannibal, acknowledging the understanding on Will’s face. ‘It’s also a term from the dead religion of psychoanalysis. An imago is an image of a loved one, buried in the unconscious, carried with us all our lives.’

Loved one.

Will’s eyes narrowed as he did his best to ignore the jolt that sent through him, the echoing thrill in his heart. He tilted his head, considering. ‘An ideal.’

‘The concept of an ideal. I have a concept of you, just as you have a concept of me.’

Will huffed an ironic laugh at that. ‘Neither of us ideal.’ Couldn’t help the barbed comment.

The briefest hitch, almost a wince as Hannibal considered that, quiet for a moment – Will’s heart and his darkness warred over just how to feel about it. He chose to stay quiet as Hannibal nodded to himself, another decision acknowledged, shifting slightly in his chair before he spoke again, hand running down his chest to flatten his tie.

‘There is an ideal that exists for someone in my… position, Will. An expectation. To answer your question, all *this,’* gesturing between them, to the blanket, ‘is called aftercare, and it is something that someone in my position is always expected to do… *should* do.’

Will knew better than to interrupt, he hadn't asked for simply an answer, he had demanded an *explanation* and he could hear the *but* lingering in Hannibal’s voice. He raised his eyebrows, a sardonic invitation for Hannibal to continue…

‘Like the safe words, Will, it has never been something I have cared enough to do. Before.’ A look of amused distaste on his face. ‘I have never before cared to be someone’s *ideal*. My… *proclivities* have always been my own. And while another’s pleasure in them could be anticipated, expected even, it was also… incidental. My activities, my lessons, my amusement… pain, pleasure, surrender, control - they were all for me, and me alone.’

Will couldn’t help but hold his breath as Hannibal spoke, even as his anger and expectation mounted at each word, knowing deep in his heart that this frank explanation, Hannibal’s honesty, was a rarity indeed, a gift unlike anything he had ever experienced. Still, his fingers bit into the arms of the chair, anger simmering, bubbling up…

‘So Bedelia was right. I was just one more in a long line of toys.’

But even as he said it, Will knew just how false it was. While maybe it had started that way, something *else* had grown between them, something that Hannibal – hell, something Will himself – hadn’t known what to do with. Maybe still didn’t.

A deep breath at Will’s dark scowl, a hand raised, a gentle request for reprieve, a small surrender of Hannibal’s own.

‘I would not choose my therapist lightly, Will. Bedelia may be many things but oblivious is not one of them. And she is more than aware of my history of discarded playthings. I won’t lie to you. Right or wrong, should or shouldn't, I have simply never bothered to care before. With anyone.’

Will tensed as Hannibal leaned forward, earnest once again, holding Will’s gaze, forcing him to hear what he had to say, to believe.

‘You make me want to care, Will. Even when I have tried not to.’

Will held tight to his stony silence, even as his heart thrilled, the fire in those words sending shivers straight through him. Hannibal’s words meant everything, but… it still wasn't enough.

‘Watching you leave on Friday, after I forced you to leave… the office, my house… after everything that happened between us, I knew I should never have let you go, not in that state. And yet, watching you leave, your independence in spite of it all, your ferocity, your uncompromising

demands… You have *become*, Will, and it is a glorious thing to behold. I cannot undo it. All I can promise is that I will not repeat my mistake. I have never wished to be anything to anyone, Will. But you are my ideal made flesh, a fact made all the more clear to me as I watched you walk away. The collar that you wear holds responsibilities on both sides of the coin, and for the first time, I feel the desire to live up to them, to exceed them… for you.'

Despite the anger still simmering beneath his skin, Will's heart soared and twisted. The rush of Hannibal's words, the tumult and crash of them, pushed him up and out of his chair to pace the space between them, fingers rubbing at the back of his neck.

Despite Hannibal's frank and surprising openness, despite the profound implications of his confession, Will knew he couldn't let his heart distract him from pursuing the full gamut of answers he sought. He wouldn't let it stay his hand. Hannibal had more things to answer for and Will wasn't finished with him yet.

Everything everything everything.

'What is control to you, anyway, Hannibal?'

Coming at it, at *him*, from the side. Will paced a wider circle, but kept a close watch on Hannibal, gauging his response, both of them still on edge. Hannibal seemed to look inward as he considered his answer, voice even and smooth once again.

'Control is a leash, Will. A person-suit, drawn tight over whatever lies beneath. We seek control when we know there is something inside us that, if unleashed, has the will and power to destroy. Sometimes we seek it in ourselves and sometimes from others. Some look specifically to *lose* control, for reasons of their own. Control can be used to hold someone together, and control can be used to take someone apart, to make and remake. But it is a devil's bargain, Will, for one must always give something up in order to possess it.'

Control in release. Release in control.

'And what have you given up?' Will felt that anger, that heat, rippling at the edges of his mind, eager to goad that smooth exterior. 'You've made it clear that you've always gotten exactly what you wanted from your *playthings* ... What did you give up with them?' A beat as he caught Hannibal's eye, his steps not slowing for a second as he stalked closer to Hannibal's chair. 'What have you given up for me?'

Brows raised in speculation, as if thinking of those others wasn't something he'd bothered to do before. 'With them? Virtually nothing. Intimacy perhaps. Connection. A low price for one who had never sought such things.'

Hannibal's hand suddenly snaked out to grip Will's wrist as he crossed in front of him, pulling him up, holding him hard and fast, forcing him to look him in the eye. Will sucked in a breath, a sharp wave of arousal kicking through his gut, immediate, shameless, visceral. Hannibal's eyes were dark as they pinned him, *smelled* him.

'But with you, Will, the price was infinitely higher.'

Hannibal's words hovered electric between them as he gripped Will's wrist. Again a sudden flash of arousal as Will remembered the ropes, Hannibal's fingers pressing him down, those hands squeezing him tight…

Will swallowed hard and waited for him to say more, anger mounting as once again Hannibal hesitated, eyes faltering under Will's steely gaze.

Will let that viciousness seep back to the fore in the face of Hannibal's continued silence. He tested his own words, felt the savagery glinting along their sharp edges. *Sometimes you have to draw a little blood before you can heal*. Will's voice was dark when it finally came, but plain, the question that had hounded him for months finally thrown between them as he held Hannibal's eyes, hard.

'Why won't you fuck me, Hannibal? Why won't you let me touch you?'

The room was silent as the question hung in the charged air. Hannibal's eyes blazed and his lips parted… but then shut, faltering around a response, fingers slowly loosening around Will's wrist. Will waited for a breath, two, every second of silence inciting that *thing* inside him. Instead he wrenched his wrist from Hannibal's grip and set himself to pacing the room again, gesturing widely, accusatory. Hannibal didn't get up, didn't admonish him, simply let Will bluster and storm, perhaps a sort of penance of his own.

'Dammit, Hannibal. I know you want me, want *this* - even your precious control can't hide that, so don't pretend it's anything other than flat denial. You said that I come to you for control, so control is what you would give me, *take* from me. And you're right, I do come to you for that control, but because it gives me *release*, Hannibal, *you give me release*! I was so goddamn tired when I first came here. I have this *thing* inside me, these… desires… this *violence*, and I'm tired of having to hide it, tired of gripping the leash so hard. I'd been denying it, denying *me*, for so long I couldn't even remember what it felt like to let go.'

Will took a shuddering breath, steps slowing as he drew closer. He could feel the heat of his fury starting to sputter under the weight of his emotions, his own words reminding him of the yawing depth of gratitude inside him. But he wouldn't let it overtake his need for answers, fists clenching as he continued.

'When I'm with you… what you taught me… I know that you see me, see that thing inside me, and that *you want me anyway*.' A beat. A breath dragged through clenched teeth. Will stopped pacing, held his ground and Hannibal's burning stare. 'When I surrender to you, I can finally *let go*. But what about *your* release, Hannibal? What satisfaction do you allow *yourself*? Why all this fucking denial?'

Hannibal held his eyes for a breath, two, obviously trying to contain anger of his own as he'd watched Will pace and rant, iron grip on himself still tight, but obviously hanging by a thread. Will's nerves fired on all cylinders as he watched Hannibal slowly rise from his seat, eyes flashing, fists and muscles tight, like a predator tensing to pounce on its prey. It forced Will back a step, even as everything inside him called out to it, thrilled to see it. He could almost smell the animal scent of him on the air. When it finally came, Hannibal's voice was a rough growl that shuddered through him.

'*Your* release, Will – the release I allow myself is through gaining *your surrender*... the satisfaction of your radiance, all *this* vicious beauty, offered up to me on a silver platter. *That* is the release I allow myself.'

Will swallowed hard, stalking closer, fury blazing hot once more, entirely unleashed now, even as Hannibal's words burned through his veins.

‘What you *“allow yourself”,* Hannibal? Christ, how dare you? You, of all people, with all your talk of being “intimate with your instincts” and “never denying your nature”. Was that only supposed to apply to me?’

Will looked him slowly up and down, breathing heavy, sparks flying between them, their words echoing in the crackling silence… until the second he felt Hannibal inch closer. Provoking, punishing, Will pulled away, stepping back to his chair, luring Hannibal to follow through the scorched air between them, a thrill of triumph as measured steps mirrored his own. But still Will felt honesty brimming, even through his predatory fury, the tether pulling tight under his ribs.

‘You know, you said something to me on Friday, Hannibal, before you forced me to leave. Four little words. Sentences you started but never finished. I want you to finish them now. You said “ *I don’t…You won’t…* ” You don’t *what,* Hannibal? Go ahead, I want you to tell me what you’ve decided I “ *won’t* ” do.’

Will flopped back into his chair, steepling his fingers in mock interest as he slowly crossed his legs at the knee, staring Hannibal down as he waited for his response.

Hannibal had the look of a caged beast, just as liable to lash out as to submit, eyes aflame, seeking violence of his own. Again Will’s gut thrilled at it, a hot jolt of arousal, despite his anger, or maybe because of it. Will couldn’t help but revel in the sensation, the release of it; he felt righteous, reckless… somehow like stepping into one of those long-abandoned bars, mouth rough, goading Hannibal into taking the first punch. But despite his tenuous grip, Hannibal simply took a deep breath, one deliberate step closer, and locked eyes with him, answering into the air that crackled between them.

‘Two sentences almost crossed my lips that night, Will. *I don’t* … think I can control myself anymore. *You won’t* … want what I’m going to do to you.’ Hannibal paused, hungry gaze like a brand on Will’s skin. ‘You come to me for control, Will, and I can’t promise to control myself with you, not anymore, not if I allow myself to cross that line. And I can’t promise that you’ll want what I’m going to want to do to you when that happens.’

Do you know what you do to me?

Will’s cock was immediately hard, breath catching in his throat, his temper somehow making it all the more insistent. But still Hannibal continued, stalking closer, the heat rolling off him in waves, that *thing* roaring and raging behind his eyes, barely contained.

‘There is something… hungry… inside me, Will. Something ravenous. Insatiable. Something that longs to consume, to rip and rend and *take*. To suck the meat and marrow from the beauty of the world, to make and unmake it as I wish, and elevate it in its destruction. You know just what it’s like to have such a thing under your skin, the temptation to drop the leash - we are identically different after all. But I won’t risk losing you to it. Not even to have everything I could ever want. You say you surrender to me in order to finally drop your leash, to hand me the reins and trust in *my* control to hold them tight… But what if that control were to slip, Will? Tell me, what would I be to you then?’

And just like that, it all clicked into place, and Will felt a sudden, sickening jolt of understanding.

He thinks you won’t really want to see the real him, in all that feral glory… won’t be able to stomach whatever’s caged underneath all that control. He doesn’t trust himself to drop the leash - that you’ll still want him, still need *him, without that iron grip.*

Will's heart lurched hard in his chest, beating hard even as his anger flared again, both warring with that deep throb of arousal at even the idea of that *thing* being unleashed on him, the phantom taste of blood in his mouth… But just the thought of Hannibal presuming that *he* could decide what Will would want, what he could take…

In the end it was the anger that won out, jolting Will once again out of his seat, stalking across to where Hannibal sat, bearing down on him, pinning his shoulders back into the chair, ignoring the surprised look on Hannibal's face as he ground out the words only inches from his face, voice low and dripping with danger.

'How dare you try to make that choice for me, Hannibal? To presume you *know better*. I may have given you control, *Sir*, but I never said you could take my fucking *agency*. I have more power on my knees, remember? And I chose to be here, with you, I chose more, *begged* for more. Did it ever occur to you that I know *exactly* what I'm asking for?'

Will held his eyes until the moment he saw that his words had made it past that cool facade, sinking in as deep as a blade, before pushing off Hannibal's shoulders, moving to slowly pace around the room once again.

This time Hannibal rose immediately to follow, no longer content to sit and watch, the tether so tight now that neither of them seemed able to bear the distance. When Hannibal's voice called after him, rising to its full might, that deep command, that strength, echoed in Will's bones, stopping him in his tracks…

'And how could you have truly known what you wanted, Will, when I'd put you in such a state? I purposefully placed myself in a position of power over you, made you beg for every touch, every release, shaped every response in your body. How are you to truly consent to more, when that *more* wants to ravage you until you scream?'

Will swallowed hard around his need, steps stuttering - tried to take a second to breathe, to quell the blood rushing in his ears so he could wrap his mind around what Hannibal was insinuating. He leaned heavily on the small table in front of him, Hannibal's drawing table, letting his head hang briefly. The tumult of his thoughts threatened to overwhelm him, his heart competing with his outrage, still out for blood. When at last he could formulate a response, Will's tone was deadly quiet but strong, spoken into the space between his arms, fists clenched on the table.

'You're afraid you've manipulated me into wanting this, aren't you? You need to listen to me, Hannibal… Before I came here I felt twisted, dirty, alone. But you saw what was inside me and didn't recoil from it. You saw it and told me it was beautiful. You licked the blood from my lips, and laughed at the scalpel in my hand.'

In a stroke of raw serendipity, Will caught the glint of something nestled between Hannibal's drawings of him, huffed out a low laugh as he saw that same scalpel gleaming there, as if it had been waiting for him. The sight of it calmed him somehow, steeled his resolve, the warm memory stirring in him of the pride in Hannibal's eyes when he had sucked Will's blood off his thumb, that moment when Will had known deep in his gut that Hannibal not only saw that thing inside him, but reveled in it.

The scalpel glistened like a talisman, and Will could suddenly feel just how close to *everything* they were. He palmed it subtly, turning slowly to stalk back towards Hannibal once again, taking in the wary, hungry stance, the caged silence and the heavy breath. But this time his voice was even, firm. He willed Hannibal to hear every single word he had to say.

‘With all your knowledge and intrusion, Hannibal, for all your insights, I sometimes wonder if you understand *us* at all. You and I *are* just alike. I’m not just another plaything you’ve manipulated into letting you toy with me, and you know it. I’m here, eyes wide open. You saw the darkness inside me and you wanted me anyway. Why is it so hard to imagine that I would want you back? *All* of you? ’ A beat as he let his words sink in, watched as Hannibal’s eyes blazed with hope and need. ‘I see you, Hannibal, and I choose you *because* of what I see, not *in spite* of it.’

Will closed the last bit of distance between them, holding up the scalpel so that it caught the light, watched Hannibal’s eyes widen imperceptibly as he registered what Will held in his grip. Hannibal’s tongue slipped out to wet his lips, the hunger in his gaze burning through Will’s anger, leaving only need in its wake. Stalking ever closer, Will weighed and shifted the scalpel in his fingers.

‘Tell me you want me, Hannibal.’

Hannibal let out a low growl, edged razor-sharp and red-hot, desperate to get out. It resonated straight through him, goosebumps prickling over Will’s skin as he sucked in a breath. Hannibal also stepped forward. They circled each other, animal and intent, Hannibal’s voice a feral purr.

‘I want you more than anything I have ever wanted in my life. Ravenously. But if I let myself have you, Will Graham, I would have all of you, whole and entire, not just a taste. If I let myself, I won’t be able to stop… not until I have everything.’

Everything everything everything.

The words beat in Will’s head, in his heart, in his cock, the moment of truth.

A bright sliver of pain as Will drew the scalpel over the soft flesh of his thumb, then let it fall to the floor. Will’s gut thrilled at the flash in Hannibal’s eyes as he registered the few drops of Will’s blood that softly pattered to the floor as he closed the distance between them, Hannibal’s nostrils flaring slightly, scenting the blood in the air.

A low growl was building in his chest as they circled each other, the tatters of Hannibal’s waning control white-knuckling his remaining grip. Will could feel him vibrating with need as he stepped right up against Hannibal’s chest, invading his space, lips hot at his ear as he purred his need.

‘I want you on me. I want you inside me. I want you running in my veins and between my teeth. Right now I don’t want your control, Hannibal. Right now I want *everything*.’

Will reached up and smeared his bloody thumb over Hannibal’s parted lips, slow and deliberate.

Every hair on his body stood up at the sound that rolled out of Hannibal’s throat, ravenous, feral, savage. Hannibal opened his mouth to suck hard on Will’s bloody thumb, eyes rolling back, already gripping his shoulders hard enough to bruise. The velvety softness of Hannibal’s tongue, teeth scraping at the base of his thumb - Will could feel his blood pounding with it.

Hannibal sucked hard once more before pulling Will into a deep and devouring kiss, the taste of Will’s blood on Hannibal’s tongue, that heady mix of need and hunger, making Will growl into Hannibal’s mouth as they licked and bit at each other, starving, ready to eat each other alive.

Neither of them wasted any more time. Hannibal’s hands ripped Will’s undershirt off over his head, only breaking the kiss for an instant, just long enough for Will to see his blood on Hannibal’s lips,

his teeth, before diving back into that savage kiss. Hannibal tore into him, teeth biting and licking across his neck, over his collar, along his jaw, his shoulders.

Will tore at Hannibal right back, ripping at his vest and shirt, sending buttons scattering across the floor, pulling loose his tie, but not before twisting it, turning it in his fist to briefly tighten around Hannibal's throat, relishing the hitch of his breath, the strangled moan, the sight of his blood on Hannibal's collar, the tie, his neck - it set him on fire. Will lapped at it, tasting every inch of Hannibal's skin as it was exposed, dragging his lips down Hannibal's chest, rubbing his face in his chest hair, inhaling the deep animal scent of him, just as he'd always longed to do – only to have Hannibal drag him back into another crushing kiss, like he could never get enough, the taste of his blood sending goosebumps down Will's spine.

Will let out an animal groan as Hannibal's hands scooped under his ass, lifting him with a growl, striding forward to slam him back against the nearby wall as he continued to devour his mouth. Will wrapped his legs around Hannibal's waist and held on with a deep moan, full of relief and raw desire, fingers fisting in Hannibal's hair as he dipped to lick and bite at Will's still sensitive nipples, pressing him hard into the wall, fingers digging into the sore flesh of his ass through his boxers.

Hannibal suddenly pulled him off the wall, one step, two, and Will was unceremoniously dropped into Hannibal's desk chair, delirious from the rough treatment, the ring in his collar jangling. Hannibal towered over him, chest heaving, Will's blood and a snarl on his lips, eyes incandescent, that *thing* fully unleashed now and a glory to behold.

Will tried to rise, going after his prize once again, a snarl of his own filling the air between them. But Hannibal grinned, and quick as the devil, raised his foot and slammed Will back into the chair with it, the chair rolling back into the desk, the sole of Hannibal's shoe pressing heavy into the meat of Will's shoulder. He held Will's eyes hard as he pinned him in place, the implication clear, no polite orders now, only sheer animal intent.

In a wild moment of freedom, Will grinned and gripped Hannibal's shoe, pulling it to him just enough that he could lick a long slow stripe up the side of it, holding Hannibal's eyes the whole time, relishing Hannibal's bared teeth, the raw hiss of breath he'd solicited.

Hannibal gave his shoulder one last push with his foot before pulling it back, but still Will didn't move, Hannibal's hard stare keeping him pinned in place. Will's cock throbbed madly at the sight of Hannibal slowly undoing the button of his pants, the drag of his zipper as it was lowered, Hannibal's cock huge and hard behind the thin cloth of his briefs.

For a second it was as if the world held its breath as they eyed each other, drinking in the delicious tension strung between them, tight and hot and hungry, their breath heaving in the quiet space.

'Is this what you wanted, Will?'

Hannibal's voice was rough with dark promise, teasing, taunting, wild and vicious and perfect. Will had no more words, simply nodded once and licked his lips, a cry pulled from him as Hannibal reached forward to grab him by the hair, dumping him onto his knees at his feet.

It was all the permission Will needed. He rubbed his face against Hannibal's hard length, still inside his briefs, pressing against him like a beast in heat. Only when he heard the warning growl from Hannibal did he stop, groaning as fingers twisted hard in his hair, finally raising his hands to free Hannibal's cock from its cage, throwing one last coy look up through his lashes before opening his mouth and swallowing down Hannibal's entire length.

The moan that ripped from both of them filled the office, Will's humming around Hannibal's thick cock, Hannibal's loosed freely into the air. Will took him all the way into his throat, as far as he could, the taste of him making Will's eyes roll back with relief. Will felt Hannibal stagger back a bit, even with that tight grip fisting his curls, but he followed him forward, swallowing around him, hands sliding around his hips to hold on to the back of Hannibal's waistband. Again, there was something decadently debauched about Hannibal still being partially clothed, the feel of the fabric against Will's skin, the bite of his knees on the floor, surrendering to being used.

Will pulled back to breathe before taking him down again, tongue moving over the head of Hannibal's cock, then down around his balls. Hannibal gave him free rein for only a moment, before both hands gripped his hair, pushing Will up and down his cock, fucking his mouth until he forced himself deep into Will's throat, holding him there until Will's throat contracted around him, nails scratching at Hannibal's hips in a bid for air… until finally Hannibal pulled him off again, letting Will drag in an exultant breath, ragged and wet, only to push him back down again, and *again* - cutting off his air, giving it back to him whenever he chose, controlling his breathing with his thick cock.

Will was dizzy with bliss, utterly overwhelmed, completely overcome by Hannibal's need, his own ready surrender, relishing Hannibal's cock as it was shoved down his throat, gulping in sweet air when Hannibal allowed it. There was nothing else, he needed nothing else, even his own heavy cock almost forgotten in the heady rush of being used like this, of being entirely at Hannibal's mercy.

Will could feel Hannibal's balls drawing up tight, the thick vein under his cock throbbing against his tongue, blood rushing just under the skin. With a cry, Hannibal dragged Will off him, ignoring his sputtering gulps for air as he hauled him to his feet, hands under his arms, hauling him up in the air to get his arms under Will's legs, wrapping them around his waist once again, kicking the chair out of the way.

Hannibal lay Will down on the desk, legs dangling over the edge. It was still a mess from before, the smell of Will's sweat and need even greater now. Hannibal followed him down, as if even this was too much distance between them, a low rumble issuing from him, like an animal defending its meal…or its mate…

Hannibal licked at the wetness on Will's swollen lips, biting at them until Will let him in, tongue plunging deep into his mouth, taking the edge off the loss of his cock.

Will let out a groan as Hannibal continued to kiss and lick and bite down his neck, his tongue teasing under the ridge of Will's collar, trailing down his chest, his stomach, working his way lower. Will looked down just as Hannibal looked up, their eyes locking, Hannibal kneeling between his legs, eyes burning with hunger as he pulled Will's boxers all the way down and off.

'Do you know how long I've wanted to taste you, Will? To devour every part of you?'

Words whispered over the sensitive skin of Will's cock, shuddering through him as Hannibal scented up his length, the echoes of sensation from earlier enough to make Will groan with anticipation. But this time he could reach out, unbound, free – he gripped at Hannibal's hair and arched up into him, urging him on. A wanton cry was wrenched from him as Hannibal opened his mouth and swallowed him down, humming his pleasure all the way deep into his throat.

Will thought he would explode with it, fingers fisting in Hannibal's hair, panting deeply as he tried to hold on, as Hannibal sucked him down, lips and tongue moving along his length, so deep Will

thought he would drown in the pleasure of it all. Hannibal's fingers rolling and massaging his balls, slick, sliding up and down his cock alongside his mouth, dipping to press hard against his perineum as Will's eyes rolled and his moans grew louder.

Will writhed and squirmed against those fingers - beyond words now but still goading Hannibal on, desperate to feel him as he never had, where he already ached to be filled. When Hannibal's slick fingers dipped lower still, circling his hole, Will loosed a deep guttural moan, ratcheting up even louder as Hannibal swallowed him down one last time, holding him tight in his throat as he circled and pressed. Will could feel his muscles starting to shake. He pulled at Hannibal's hair, knowing he'd never last if he kept at him like this, desperate not to spend before he could feel Hannibal inside him.

Finally Hannibal obliged as Will's moans became desperate, pulling off him, sucking in a breath of his own as he dropped lower between Will's legs, throwing his knees over his shoulders. Will writhed on the desk, another groan building as he felt Hannibal's tongue on him, lapping and pressing, finally breaching that tight ring to push inside him, plunging in and out of his hole, opening him, tasting him, Hannibal's low moan against him kicking off a shudder that rolled through him in waves.

Will barely registered when Hannibal reached blindly for the lube, slicking his hand without missing a beat, fingers replacing the softness of his tongue - harder, more insistent, thicker, deeper, pushing in steadily, first one, then two, pulling out to push back in, *twisting*, hitting a place inside him that had Will panting and moaning and squirming on the desk, completely at Hannibal's mercy.

Already Will felt insatiable, bracing his feet on Hannibal's shoulders so he could grind down harder on those fingers, an open-throated cry as he felt Hannibal push in a third, and then *spread* his fingers, stretching him open, filling him up, owning him so completely that Will couldn't breath. He didn't even recognize the keening sound that tore from his throat as Hannibal pulled his fingers free, leaving him gaping, only to plunge both thumbs back into him, stretching him open once again so he could lick around Will's pulsing rim.

'Please please please…' It was all Will could manage, knowing he couldn't hold on much longer.

Hannibal let out a growl, *inside him*, nipping at his hole, two fingers plunging in deep again alongside his tongue, twisting in and out, the sound of it positively obscene. Finally pulling out to climb back up along Will's body, keeping Will's knees over his shoulders, folding him practically in half as Will moaned his need. Hannibal's hard weight on top of him was delicious and Will gripped and scratched at his back, his shoulders, pulling him tighter, taking his weight, begging for it, grinding up against him. Will could feel the decadent scratch of those wool pants against the raw skin of his ass, moaning and panting even more as he felt Hannibal's cock pressing at his hole, lining up, thick, heavy, and insistent.

Hannibal didn't wait, just locked eyes with him and pushed all the way in, deep and hard and long - stayed buried in him as their moans filled the air, immediately setting a punishing rhythm, pounding into him, slamming Will into the desk. Will's cries and groans were punched from him with each thrust, and he thought his heart would crack open with the sheer perfection of it, the coppery taste of his own blood in his mouth and the delicious burn of Hannibal's cock buried in his ass, stretching him open, no quarter, no holding back, just sheer animal savagery.

Hannibal's pace did not falter; if anything it sped up as he brought one hand up between them to grip hard at Will's throat, wrapping over his collar and *squeezing* tight, cutting off his air, dipping his head once to lick at Will's parted lips. Will's head was already dizzy and swimming, eyes rolling back… until Hannibal finally let Will suck in one ragged gulp of air… only to wrap both hands around his throat now, pressing hard against Will's windpipe, collar digging in under that strong grip, still thrusting into him, impaling him on his cock.

Will let his eyes roll closed, bathed in sensation, each second without breath narrowing his world to Hannibal's cock inside him, the feel of those hands on his throat, body heavy against him, lips licking and kissing and biting at his jaw… Total trust, total surrender. Will had never felt so used and so cherished at the same time, and he knew he could never again live without it.

Hannibal finally released his throat, allowing him a deep gulp of air, his thrusts now angling to pound at that spot inside that had Will shouting, cries ragged in his ravaged throat. Will could feel wetness on his fingertips, sliding against the skin of Hannibal's back, and he knew he'd drawn blood. He felt wild, his only tether the one spiked between his heart and Hannibal's, so tight now…

Everything everything everything.

Will could feel the electricity gathering at the base of his spine, the heat pooling in his gut. He knew he wouldn't last much longer, the sounds coming from Hannibal making his cock jump and twitch as it rubbed between them. He tightened around Hannibal's cock, bloody fingers digging into Hannibal's back, urging him to go deeper, harder, faster, as Will hurtled towards his finish.

When Hannibal reached between them and gripped his cock, Will let out a shout, clenching his teeth against the rising tide of his orgasm, still no more able to come without permission than that morning. His eyes locked on Hannibal's, thrilling at the dark fire of that *thing* unleashed, his own rising up to meet it as Hannibal's lips pulled back, teeth barred in a savage, wicked grin, voice feral and dark as his hand slid up and down Will's cock, his words punctuated by his own thrusts.

'Come for me, Will.'

Release tore through him. Pain and pleasure, submission and surrender, fire and flesh, need and release - it all rushed through Will's body and soul like an explosion of heat and light, roiling through his veins, his spine, straight to his cock, cries ravaging his throat. Will came even harder than earlier, harder than he thought possible, biting down on the meat between Hannibal's neck and shoulder and holding on, feeling blood seep around his teeth, flooding his mouth as the waves of his orgasm rolled and crashed through him like they might never stop.

Hannibal let out a strangled moan but didn't pull away, still pounding into him over and over and over, milking Will's cock with his hand, bringing it to his lips once again to lick clean as his thrusts became wilder, more erratic. Will dug his fingers into Hannibal's ass, pulling him in harder, teeth finally letting go, gathering his words about him even in his bliss, finally gripping the back of Hannibal's neck, pulling him down close so he could growl hot in his ear through bloodied teeth.

'Come for *me*, Hannibal.'

Hannibal loosed an open-throated cry and buried himself deep, plunging hard once, twice, before his own teeth bit down hard on Will's neck, an identical brand. Wave after shuddering wave pulsed up and out of him, shooting hot into Will, even as Hannibal sucked and lapped at the blood he had

drawn, hands coming up to fist in Will's hair, both of them panting as they rode out the last pulses of orgasm - clinging to each other, hot and wet, bloody and radiant.

Will felt himself drifting on the electric thrum between them as they lay there panting, Hannibal's weight still heavy on top of him, fingers still tangled in his hair. When eventually they pulled back, both of them reached at the same time to smooth the sweaty hair back from the other's brow, Will leaving faint bloody marks on Hannibal's skin, feeling the aftershocks that shot through them both as they each eyed the other's bloody lips and teeth.

Hannibal searched Will's face, something aching and tremulous in his eyes, before he dipped to press a soft kiss to the corner of his mouth. Then, slowly, he eased Will's knees down from his shoulders and gently pulled out of him, mouth softly capturing Will's quiet moan at the loss.

Will couldn't stop touching him, stroking gently down the sides of Hannibal's face, his chest, his shoulders, as if now that the floodgates had opened, and he was *allowed*, he could never bring himself to stop. Hannibal was the same, gentle fingers checking him over, pressing at the bite on his neck, not bothering with its twin on his own, smoothing back Will's sweaty curls over and over, eyes searching his face as if he expected Will to vanish right from underneath him.

Eventually Hannibal sat up, pulling Will with him, both of them leaning against the edge of the desk. They surveyed the room around them – surprisingly intact despite the violence of their coupling – blinking as the world came back into focus, as if they were both surprised it still existed.

It wasn't long before Will's muscles started trembling once again, his body overwhelmed, overcome as he shivered against Hannibal. Once more, Hannibal scooped him up, one arm behind his shoulders, the other under his knees, and carried Will back over to the divan. But this time when Will let himself melt into Hannibal's chest, there was no hot kernel of anger marring his comfort; only total, deep and intense relief, melding with profound gratitude and an even deeper feeling, one he simply allowed to beat inside him but chose not to name.

Hannibal set him down by the divan, pausing only to pull the blanket around them both before tugging Will back into his arms, both of them collapsing together, still panting and sweaty, but each holding the other tight. Will clung to Hannibal as his arms wrapped around his chest. Will's heart swelled as Hannibal's lips pressed to the top of his head, mustering his words once again, desperate for Hannibal to see, to understand, just how much he had wanted this, needed this… everyday, forever, if he could have it.

'See? This is all I ever wanted, Hannibal. For both of us.'

He could feel Hannibal's breath hitch, then sigh hot against his curls. Hannibal turned Will in his arms and gazed down at him, the blood still bright on his lips… bright as the feeling swimming in his eyes. His voice was rough but strong when he responded.

'It's beautiful.'

Dipping down to capture Will's mouth once more in a deep but gentle kiss, which Will returned with all the fervor of the unnamed feeling that beat inside him.

And Will knew, deep in his gut, that whatever happened now, whatever came next, *this* was his everything, and that he would fight tooth and nail to keep it.

Chapter End Notes

Phew! Only 2 more chapters to go! 🔥 Thanks for sticking with us dear readers, stay tuned, and hit that subscribe button.

Update- Unfortunately we both just got SLAMMED by some work/life/health stuff. We're okay, but we'll have to postpone posting the last two chapters by a few weeks. But we promise you'll get the last two chapters starting after the new year, they'll post in January! Thanks for your patience with us, we just want to give you the ending this fic deserves (and not get fired or overly compromise our health in the process).*

We've truly appreciated and enjoyed everyone's comments and encouragement as you waited the extra couple weeks for Part 3. We wanted to make sure that this home stretch got the time and attention it needed. ❤️

As always, kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are magical and we thank you for leaving them 🙂

You can find us over on Tumblr at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup. And on Twitter @MyDesignHanibl and @fragile_teacup XO

Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Tensions mount as an unexpected declaration forces a reckoning.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your patience (yet again), we hope it was worth the wait! ✊🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Time slowed. The world shrunk. There was home (sleep, eat, shower, walk the dogs, watch the clock) and then there was *him*. His voice, commands dripping like honey; his hands, possessive, coaxing; his cock, salty on Will's tongue, sliding heavy and thick inside him.

They worked, they talked, they drank wine, they fucked. Every worshipful glance, every shuddering orgasm brought fresh colour to Will's life, a new lightness to his steps. Dangerous desires not only channelled but delighted in, expanded and explored within a kaleidoscope of colour and texture and touch. Experiences made all the richer as a new realisation quietly dawned, that for the first time in his life, Will *belonged*. He was cherished, *owned*. Caught fast in the razor-sharp teeth of desire, of reciprocal obsession. And when he gazed into Hannibal's eyes, he saw reflected back his own ferocious smile - and it was just as bloodied, just as *besotted*, as Hannibal's own.

Their play was seasoned with a fresh intensity. The first time Hannibal had produced a riding crop and ordered him to bend over, Will's fingers had fumbled, trembling at his belt, a whine of need tightening his throat, so eager for the sharp sting of leather biting into his flesh. Not even a week later, they had shifted to a flogger, butter-soft tails trailing across Will's bound torso, tickling his nipples in seemingly endless teasing before Hannibal's guttural demand for Will to present for him. And then, oh, then… pleasure, obliteration, white-hot and perfect. The lash of Hannibal's voice in harmony with the heavy thud of the whip, steel praises ringing clear with every stroke. And afterwards, as Will had lain across Hannibal's lap on the divan, he had tucked away a quiet smile of pride, hoarding the sensation of careful fingers as they tended and stroked, soothing every scarlet stripe, sifting through damp curls, an exercise in adoration and utter acceptance.

Mutual veneration. Of darkness once caged, now ripped free, elevated and beautiful. Twin creatures, once so alone without each other, now blurring in violent desires painted across Will's eager body.

But…

Every night, Will begrudgingly knelt at Hannibal's feet, his collar unbuckled and his throat left bare, his heart just a little heavier than the night before.

Every night, they parted with soft words, lingering kisses.

Every night, they parted.

Every night.

****

'I can't.' Sweat dripping like tears down hot cheeks, Will bucked, frantic, hard cock bobbing in the air as it sought, fruitlessly, for something to rut against. 'If you keep fucking me with that thing, I'm going to come.'

'Insolent boy. You will not.'

Said with perfect surety as, with equally perfect timing, Hannibal pressed the warm, slick toy deep inside him, a delicious reprimand. The long glass dildo, thick and ribbed and ringed - one that despite everything, Will had blushed scarlet at the very sight of - was a divinely torturous tease, Hannibal working it slowly in to the hilt, twisting *just so* until Will's body, naked but for his collar, writhed on the leather divan.

'You will take it all and you will take it beautifully, and you will not come until I say that you may.'

Again, that tone, that surety; it held him fast, his release held hostage within an iron command. Will squirmed and whined anew. 'God… Let me come.'

'No.'

Another twist, a clever manipulation to rub against that sweet spot inside, and Will sobbed as pre-come dribbled from his straining cock. But he could hear the smile in Hannibal's denial. How he loved it when Will begged.

'Please.'

'No.'

'Please, *Sir*.'

'No.'

Again that cool collection, absolute control. But Will knew what was underneath, the desire that stalked, waiting to devour him, growing all the more ravenous as he begged for release. And beg he did, a string of pleas falling from his lips, as his body shook and his mind splintered in shards of gold, liquid pleasure coursing bright and hot.

So desperate, even the one word he thought he would *never* use perched on his tongue: one of two gifted at a time of negotiation, when boundaries were torn down and frontiers expanded. Yellow and red. One for slow and one for stop. He'd used yellow just once, when the lash of the whip was new, partly from the need to catch his breath, mostly just to see what would happen. And Hannibal had slowed at once, no hesitation, no delay. It had been empowering, to be at once the object of hushed concern, even as hooded eyes had glittered arousal, even as the rigid line of Hannibal's cock had pressed into Will's ass.

But now, after an hour - more, surely - of teasing touches and gentle fingers working him wide - of being fucked mercilessly on the dildo while Hannibal had suckled on his lower lip, his nipples, his cock - of being brought time and again to the brink, only to be denied the final swelling crescendo of release - now it was the *other* word that fluttered behind closed lids. *Red*. But…

Will didn't *want* Hannibal to stop. *Never stop*. He wanted more, always more. Was greedy for it. And even this delicious torture would not be near enough to make him utter that word.

Hannibal's head bent low, sensual lips capturing the leaking tip of Will's cock, tongue laving the underside. And still he fucked the toy in and out, smooth ridges catching at Will's sensitised rim.

'Beautiful boy.' The words purred against his belly, rubbed against the side of his cock. 'See how well you take it.'

Will turned his cheek into cool leather, biting his cheeks around a smile. ‘Cruel.’

The toy stilled, and a whisper of fingertips along his cock drew fresh whimpers. ‘It’s yours to choose, Will. Always. One word and I’m yours to command.’ Warm breath feathered the sticky tip. ‘Tell me. Do you want me to stop?’

It was always like this - Hannibal pushing at his safe words, his limits, as if he still couldn’t believe Will would let him use him this way, let alone be desperate for it, exalt in it - laid out before his kneeling god like an offering to decadence, begging for Hannibal to bend him to his will.

Still fully clothed, Hannibal was the very model of professionalism. Not a hair out of place, not so much as a wrinkled cuff in sight. No need for it, of course: they had cleared his calendar for the whole afternoon. Doubtless the contrast in aesthetic pleased him. In an act of desperation, barely able to hold on, Will cast a suggestive glance at the hard bulge beneath pinstriped wool and licked his lips.

‘Let me suck you off.’

The vulgarity was deliberate; it drew faint colour and a displeased growl, but Will caught a flash of crimson, Hannibal’s tongue snaking out to lick at hungry lips, his voice dropping, rough.

‘If your mouth was where I wanted my cock, Will, that’s where it would be.’

‘Oh fuck…’ Will moaned at Hannibal’s perfect retaliation, the reciprocal vulgarity nearly sending him over the edge.

The toy was eased out until only the rounded tip remained, holding Will open. He shivered, wriggled, subsided again, a deep whine building in his throat. But he wasn’t about to give up.

‘But you’re as hard as I am.’ Goading. ‘Fuck me, then. You’ve got me nice and wet and open for you. Shame to waste me on a toy.’

Exquisite, the flare of savage heat in dark eyes. And Will smothered his triumph as the toy was cast aside, falling with a thud to the pristine floor.

With one hand, Hannibal freed his cock and with the other, pinned Will’s hands above his head, a predatory glint in his eyes. ‘Be careful what you wish for, Will.’

Groaning at the delicious weight finally settling atop him, Will drew up his legs and wrapped them around Hannibal’s waist.

‘Why?’ Despite the thorough fucking he’d endured already, the thick length of Hannibal’s cock still drew a gasp as he rammed it home, owning him completely. But Will was quick to adjust, hips tilting upwards, squeezing around him, greedy for every inch. ‘I want you, Sir. All of you.’

Everything everything everything…

His reward, a savage kiss, plundering and filthy. Will exalted in the ravaging, wrists still pinioned tight in Hannibal’s fists, though he would not have moved even had Hannibal seen fit to release them. With every thrust, Hannibal’s belly brushed Will’s leaking cock, the fabric of his dress shirt an almost unbearably exquisite stimulation, and he moaned his need into Hannibal’s mouth. ‘*Let me come. God, please, Sir, please…*’

With a snarl, Hannibal reared back, releasing Will's wrists to grasp his hips instead, fingertips bruising tender flesh, holding him down to fuck into him at a furious pace.

'Do. *Not*. Come.'

Will grit his teeth and moaned extravagantly. Overhead, the light spilling from the orchids cast dramatic shadows across Hannibal's face, sketching him in severe tones that masked his expression. An enigmatic god. Enraptured, fucked out, and overwhelmed, Will stared up as he forced himself to go limp, allowing his body to be used solely for Hannibal's pleasure, surrendering to the perfect storm of his own making. A few more ferocious thrusts and Hannibal filled him with hot release, every shudder vibrating through him, pushing him even closer to the brink. Still, he held off, until the curl of sweat-damp fingers around his length, and a smoky command.

'Now, Will. Come for me, my darling boy.'

Digging his nails into the leather, Will arched off the divan with a high cry, thick ribbons of spend spattering across Hannibal's hand, dripping back down onto Will's belly and up his chest. On and on, the intensity all-consuming. Finally, fully spent and almost delirious with relief, he gripped at Hannibal's shoulders, tugging him down, holding him close as they rode out the aftershocks together.

For long minutes they held each other, both uncaring of the mess, until satiation edged into discomfort, and Hannibal carefully withdrew with a murmured endearment at Will's weak protest. Hannibal's eyes were shining, worshipful, roving over his face, searching. Will cast him a lazy grin.

'Mm. That was…' Stretching his sore limbs, Will subsided again onto the divan, watching with dazed eyes as Hannibal tucked himself away, straightening his clothes and smoothing back his hair. He reached down to stroke Will's hair back from his sweaty forehead, sending a shiver through his exhausted body, before padding quietly to the washroom.

The sound of running water was followed by the clink of china, and he returned moments later with a steaming bowl and washcloth. Setting both on the floor, he perched beside Will and regarded him for a moment with mild amusement. 'Does that sentence have an ending?'

'I don't know…delicious?' Will grinned again, letting his eyes close and his head drop back as what had just happened thrilled an aftershock through him. Still deep in the pleasure haze, thrumming with gratitude, he laughed softly as utterly unbidden spilled the words…

'Fuck, I think I love you.'

He froze, ears ringing as the words dropped like a stone into still water, rippling between them, settling into thick silence. Hannibal blinked, hesitated, lips parting just to close again, finally reaching down to wet the cloth and wring it out before setting it to Will's torso and beginning a slow sweep across his skin.

'Is the water too hot?' Voice smooth but tight.

'No.' Will swallowed around the bare whisper, a hasty retraction hovering on his tongue. But he couldn't quite bring himself to issue it. Instead, he lay back and regarded Hannibal warily, tension crawling through muscles that had just been deliciously loose.

‘You were perfect today.’ Words as gentle as his ministrations, Hannibal bent to press his lips to Will’s collar. ‘So good, so beautiful when you struggle. The aftermath can be,’ a delicate pause, eyes not quite meeting his own, ‘overwhelming.’

He thinks it was the heat of the moment… that you didn’t really mean it…

A spike of surprising disappointment covered quickly by familiar irritation. ‘It wasn’t exactly my first time, *Sir*. You’ve been edging me into oblivion for weeks now.’ Acerbic words that he knew wouldn’t help. Besides, it wasn’t as if he hadn’t revelled in every second…

Did you? Did you mean it?

Too late, anyway. Will could feel the moment slipping away. His chance to own his careless words lost to examination and hesitation. Even as Hannibal dipped down to kiss his cheek, caressing fingers had already crept around to cradle the back of his head while his collar was carefully unbuckled. Feeling its comforting weight slide free, Will tensed, anger flaring as some strange gossamer hope he couldn’t name began to unravel inside him.

‘What are you doing?’ He couldn't stop himself. Mortifying, the huskiness in his voice, but it was all he could do to keep it steady, hoping his anger might mask its tremor.

Hannibal’s eyes flicked to his, wary once again. ‘Nothing that should be surprising, Will.’ Searching his face, weighing his sudden outburst. ‘It’s late. The working day is over.’ His tone was unbearably soft but carefully even. ‘And you deserve a reward for performing so beautifully.’ A cautious smile quirked lips that Will was already aching to taste again. ‘Go home, rest, walk your dogs, make sure you eat a full meal. Perhaps tie a new lure?’ A long pause as Hannibal held his gaze, his words strangely earnest, almost tender. ‘Go home, Will, live your life.’ With one final lingering look, Hannibal rose from the divan, taking the bowl and cloth with him and disappearing into the washroom.

Every fucking night.

But this time his dismissal felt suspiciously like a rebuke, despite Hannibal’s soft tone. In a kind of freefall, Will didn’t wait for direction. Instead, he forced himself to move, wincing slightly as he stood upright, grabbing items of clothing from various surfaces as he stumbled out of the office to the client restroom. He needed to re-group.

Did you really just say that to him? Did you mean it?

He stared at himself in the mirror, as if his reflection could tell him what he should feel, what he should do. But his doppelganger only looked back into him with guarded eyes, and with a sigh he turned away.

Restoring himself to respectability took only a few minutes, and when he returned to Hannibal’s office he found him waiting, perched on the edge of his desk, an oddly tense set to his shoulders that seemed to relax minutely as Will walked in, as if he’d half expected him not to return. It was as if the whole room still rang with words Will wasn’t sure he wanted to take back…

I think I love you.

Their eyes met, silent questions flying between them, and a moment later Hannibal held out his hand in invitation. Relief thudded in Will’s chest, and swiftly he crossed the space to slip his arms

around Hannibal's waist and rest his cheek against grey plaid. Held close, cherished.

But he's still going to let you go, make *you go* .

He found himself gripping at Hannibal's shirt. Was it wrong to want more after all he'd gained? To want to push beyond the boundaries that had been set in place all those weeks ago, the lines made in the sand (*in stone?*) when Will had first accepted Hannibal's collar?

'Something that, within the bounds of this office, will mark you as mine.'

Within the bounds of the office. Only here. Hannibal's possessiveness, his affection, was undeniable. The question was not even so much about how deep his feelings ran as how much of them - of himself - Hannibal was prepared to share, how much he thought that Will could share… *should* share.

Go home, Will. Live your life.

Will frowned against Hannibal's shoulder as strong hands stroked across his back, fingers splaying in a gesture of comfort, of grounding. Under Will's cheek, the steady thump of a heartbeat at rest. The creature within sated, settled, satisfied, at least for now. A stark contrast with that which shifted, restless, beneath his own skin - unhappy at the prospect of being parted from that resonant beat for yet another night.. As Hannibal's hands slid to rest lightly on Will's shoulders, the inescapable prelude to inevitable separation, he could feel his anger mounting, frustration and an unwelcome sense of helplessness getting the better of him. Venom swelled into half-formed words he knew he didn't want to say… but Hannibal's smooth tone cut him off before he could strike…

'Before you leave, there is one more thing you could do for me.'

'Yes?' Ridiculous to sound so hopeful, so relieved. Flushing, Will lifted his head and leaned back a little, schooling his expression to neutrality. 'What is it?'

'I need you to type up the changes to my biography that my tiresome publisher has been pestering me about.' Twisting, Hannibal reached for a sheet of paper and slipped it into Will's unresisting hand. 'We can send it out with tomorrow morning's post.'

Will blinked blankly for a moment before pulling entirely free of Hannibal's hold and stepping back, watching as Hannibal noted his expression, the remaining softness in his face vanishing behind unscalable walls, pulling away himself as he steeled himself against Will's defiance, this end-of-night dance becoming achingly, frustratingly familiar.

Will sucked in a shaky breath, trying to push down his reflexive fury at the seeming flippancy of the request.

Hannibal never does or says anything without a reason. Vicious he may be, thoughtless he is not.

He took another deep breath and let a tight smile form, eyes evasive, trying to decide if he wanted to let this play out or not. 'Fine.' And, almost as an afterthought, 'Sir.' His acquiescence a lure of its own.

'Hm.' Folding his arms, Hannibal directed an imperious stare at him, straightening for the fight he could no doubt feel brewing. 'It would seem not.'

Suddenly, Will found he just didn't have the heart for it, not tonight. Instead, words tumbled out once again, impulsive, almost pleading. His hands scrubbed at the stubble on his cheeks.

'Hannibal, I… I just want….' This was intolerable. Will felt like a fumbling schoolboy. He forced himself to still and face Hannibal head on. 'Look, I'll type this up, fine, but I have… a condition.'

Hannibal's eyebrows lifted, feigning incredulity, but Will could see the caution there.

He forged ahead before Hannibal could reprimand him, trying to soften his tone, 'After I finish, come home with me. Or let me come home with you. Let me cook for you. Let me… I don't know… just let me.'

Let me say it again and mean it.

Will let the words fade to a whisper. He couldn't bring himself to put any more on the table. Felt the anger and hope and hurt roil in his belly as Hannibal's expression cycled through an almost impossible gamut before slamming shut once again.

A barely perceptible tightening of lips and voice. 'I have plans tonight.'

Will's stomach dropped, eyes narrowed, unable to ignore the challenge. 'Tomorrow night.'

'Will.' A sharpness now, dissonant, snapping taut the air between them. 'That's enough. '

Will stared him down, unable to shake the feeling that he was teetering on some precipice, one he hadn't known he was so close to until it was too late. Another step would plunge him into the abyss…

Mind buzzing with anger and utterly unsure what else to do, Will simply turned to leave… to do as he'd been told.

'Will.' Softer, earnest, hairline cracks in the cool facade as a strong hand snaked out to grip Will's forearm like a vice, stopping his retreat. Hannibal's tone darkened, rough. 'Don't you see? You have to go or I won't stop.'

Will felt his heart sink while his anger soared.

Swivelling back, incredulous, 'Christ, Hannibal, *that's still* what you're afraid of? After everything? Who says I *want* you to stop?'

A muscle jumped in Hannibal's jaw as he hesitated once again before speaking, voice low but urgent, almost pleading. 'We can't do this twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.'

Will threw up his hands, incredulous. 'Why not?'

No response to this but Hannibal's frozen silence, his expression one of pure disbelief. Will hunted for another angle, chose provocation, a caustic smile on his lips.

'What is it, Hannibal? I can't imagine that your *delicate sensibilities* object to the morality of all this. Or are you simply *afraid* ? That it won't work, that *we* won't work?' Unable to entirely hide the note of hurt, the break in his voice, calling on his anger to bury it deep. 'You still think I don't know what I'm asking for, don't you? That I don't know *you,* want *you*.'

Still Hannibal made no move towards him, expression growing more remote with every passing moment, walls only strengthening under Will's onslaught. When he finally spoke, Will could hear the quiver of taut restraint, could feel Hannibal's own anger thick between them. 'How much could we possibly know of one another, Will, outside these walls?'

Will's eyes narrowed in disbelief. '*You* set the parameters for this' - he cast a grand gesture between them, around the room, - 'whatever it is. And I respected that. Only in the office. But parameters can change, Hannibal. Lines in the sand, remember? If you want to delude yourself that we don't already know each other in every way that truly matters… if you want us to know each other better, there's a real easy way to go about it.' Chin jutting in challenge, Will took a step forward.

'What's your favourite colour?'

'Will -'

Another. 'Favourite wine?'

'Will!'

Another. 'Where did you grow up?'

This last was met with an impatient sigh, but Will could feel Hannibal's patience thinning dangerously.

'Too pedestrian? Fine.' Will pressed on, grimly determined. Because if he failed, if Hannibal refused to meet him halfway... His hands clenched into fists. 'Outside of your family, who was the first person you ever loved?'

A fair eyebrow raised, a gesture that failed to mask a brief flicker of pain, a second of open need as Hannibal searched Will's face before his eyes flared with anger of their own, shuttering once again. 'Is the next question to be about my mother, Will? I must warn you that Freud has long been regarded in psychiatric circles as flawed at best.'

Safety in satire, defence in attack. *How is it we're suddenly opponents?*

Will took one more step then stopped, the last of a flurry of questions dying on his lips. So few feet remained between them yet it felt like an impossible distance. He felt like they were right back where they had been all those weeks ago, the scalpel in his hand and a challenge on his lips. But this time all the fight seemed to suddenly drain out of him, like blood from a fatal wound. Coldness pooled in his gut. He may have vowed to fight tooth and nail for this, but suddenly Will realised that he shouldn't *have* to. He wanted *Hannibal* to fight - for him, for *them.* He could feel a sob or a scream rising in his throat, fingers tightening around the paper in his hand. A single word spilled, hoarse, and final.

'Red.'

A flash of incomprehension before a wounded exhale. 'Will -'

'Red.'

It hung in the air between them, accusation and warning both. It was, Will thought bleakly, the first time he had ever seen Hannibal lost for words of his own. Pushed beyond the limits of his

endurance, Will forged ahead before his heart could stop him.

‘I’ll get this typed up before I go.’ Brandishing the paper like a talisman, Will backed away, his gaze sliding from Hannibal’s as he tried to focus on reaching the door, fury beating cold in his chest like a second heartbeat

He pulled the door closed against Hannibal’s frozen expression, forcing himself to ignore it. He turned and rested for a moment against the heavy, sure surface, adrenaline thrumming, before reminding himself that the glass wasn’t opaque and pushing himself hastily upright. Momentum. Had to keep moving. Momentum would carry him though.

Back at his desk, he smoothed out the crumpled page for Hannibal’s publisher with trembling hands, set it gently to one side. Waited for a beat, two, and when he was confident (hurt) that the danger of interruption had passed, threaded a fresh sheet into the Selectric and began to type. Fingers flying over the keys, mouth set in a thin line, he tried to lose himself in the staccato rhythm, the bright thread of his anger spooling tight, desperate to ignore the sick lurch in his stomach, as if the abyss had swallowed him whole after all.

Task somehow complete, he extracted the paper and laid it atop Hannibal’s draft before setting a new sheet into the typewriter. And with barely a pause, he typed:

Dear Doctor Lecter

Please accept this letter as formal notification of my resignation from the position of secretary at your practice. I regret that I cannot work out my notice; therefore you may deduct two weeks pay from my final salary. I will also make certain to leave you with any items deemed for office use only, in order to avoid any further confusion on the matter.

Thank you for the experience you have afforded me. It has been - a lesson I won’t soon forget

Sincerely,

Will Graham

Without bothering to read it through, Will grabbed an envelope, folded the letter and stuffed it inside. The hasty addition of Hannibal’s name on the front felt almost tangible, as if it was the last time he would touch him. But then he was done and there was nothing else. Mouth dry, head suddenly pounding, he propped the letter against the Selectric, riding the last of his desperate momentum as he grabbed his coat and bag, and took one final look around before heading for the door, a buzzing numbness following him outside, smothering him as he walked away.

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The first call came an hour after Will got home. Straight to voicemail. He’d been out with the dogs the entire time since getting home, barely even able to remember the drive from the office. Unable

to sit still, he'd purposefully ditched his phone on the cluttered coffee table, whistled for the dogs and headed for the forest behind the barn, seeking the quiet of the stream that ran through his property. It had brought him little solace. Even if he'd had his phone, he knew he wouldn't have picked up, but striding back into the house, fingers worrying through wind-tousled hair, the sight of the notification on the screen sent his pulse racing.

After an hour of alternately ignoring and glaring at the screen, he pressed play with a quiet curse and poured himself a couple of fingers of whiskey as he listened. There was an unfamiliar note of strain in Hannibal's voice, and Will fought a twinge of guilt as he imagined the discovery of his letter and recalled its terseness, a brevity born partly of necessity and partly from the raw instinct towards viciousness.

'Will, I… have no wish for you to leave… my employ. If I have been remiss in communicating the degree of my - esteem, then I can only chide myself.' A soft sigh punctuated a tense pause. *'Do not mistake my earlier hesitation for indifference. It would have been wrong of me to have held you to anything said in such a…vulnerable moment… to anything said by either of us. In releasing you, it was not my intention to abandon you, merely to allow you the space and distance to fully consider the implications of your… declaration. Away from any… undue influence.'* Will gripped the phone through another pause, Hannibal's sigh almost tangible against his skin. *'Please come back, Will. I - find myself quite at a loss without you.'* A hasty disconnection.

The delicate pauses, the tactful hesitations… they were *infuriating*. An almost reciprocal chill to that contained in his own resignation letter, safely couched in pseudo-professionalism. But the sound of Hannibal's voice, the husky rasp, it played deliciously along his nerve endings, raising goosebumps, his heart drumming in helpless accompaniment.

After the third replay and the fourth drink, Will stumbled to bed, head full of bitter ripostes, heart aching, empty and full in equal measure. How was it possible that someone as observant and astute as Hannibal Lecter could have misread a situation so entirely? To assume that Will's confession had been a mere slip of the tongue, an accidental ode to his post-orgasmic haze… it was equal parts insulting and mortifying. That he had, yet again, disbelieved Will's clear and stated desire for *everything* that Hannibal could throw at him; that he had *yet again* denied Will's own agency over his desires… that was *intolerable*.

Yet somewhere, buried deep within all of those carefully arranged formalities, was the truth of Hannibal's own desires - almost tangible, yet somehow still painfully elusive.

Too elusive.

Because while Hannibal's feelings seemed clear, his motivations… what he actually *wanted* from him, from them… remained as murky and dark as a frozen lake in winter. Desolation spread like a bruise across Will's heart. Rolling onto his stomach, he buried his face in the pillow, an ineffectual defence against the wounds that had been inflicted that day, their impact far greater than the welts raised by any belt.

****

Time passed in mournful contemplation of the decision he had made, but still Will clung to his resolve with grim determination. Days dragged on, the phone continuing to ring and ring until he finally just let the battery die, each and every time resisting the desperate desire to answer. He refused even to get in the car, the pull to return to the office like a fish-hook under his ribs. Instead, he would sit on the porch for hours, letting the cold seep into his bones, trying not to remember the warmth of feeling like he truly belonged to something, to *someone* , who could pull all his disparate pieces into place.

His hands he kept busy with engine grease and fly-tying lines; but his mind was storm-tossed, restless. His heart was worse still, wounded, atrophied, as if missing some crucial piece of itself.

On the morning of the fourth day, Will forced himself to meet with Alana Bloom, an ex-colleague from his Quantico days, a softly-spoken dark-haired woman with an easy smile and an astute gaze. A return to tenured teaching wasn't exactly a prospect Will relished, but the bills weren't going to pay themselves. Afterwards, the recollection of Alana's quiet enthusings filled the humming silence, but made him sick all the same. *'You're quite the legend after the Hobbs breakthrough… Jack's been dying to get you back... I'm betting they'd let you write your own curriculum.'* Will knew in his bruised heart that returning to the FBI would likely be the end of him.

But maybe that was just fine.

Back at the house, wearily surveying the carnage of the living room, floor papered with old newspaper upon which lay a variety of engine parts, Will was glumly debating whether to shelve his doubts and give Jack Crawford a call, idly musing whether this was what rock-bottom felt like… when three knocks at the door jerked his head up. Something about that sharp economy of motion, the command inherent in each rap…

No. Fucking. Way.

But the outline through the screen door was unmistakable: sleek head tilted in its usual suggestion of arrogance, broad shoulders clad in Burberry russet, gloved fingers curled inside taut black leather.

Lips thinning, eyes narrowing, heart pounding in his chest, Will debated his options: ignore or confront. *Observe or participate?* From his vantage point in the living room, was it possible that Hannibal hadn't yet detected him? Perhaps - but given the sudden stillness of the hand still raised in peremptory demand, unlikely.

Who are you kidding? He can probably smell you.

Fuck it. Suddenly greedy, desperate even, for a clear sight of his (Boss? Friend? Lover? Dom? Ex? All of those things?)... whatever the hell Hannibal was to him… Will found himself propelled forward on shaky legs and adrenaline. Fumbling fingers unlocked the latch, and he filled his lungs with a slow, steadying breath before pushing open the screen door. His gaze of guarded blue collided instantly with warm amber, and the *relief* of it - of sharing the same space again with the only person in the world who *knew* him, who understood and accepted him, who truly *saw* him - drew burning tears that he barely held in check behind a dam of still-simmering anger.

Hannibal's gaze was steadfast, unwavering in its rapacious hunger. Will gripped the door frame, his body a barrier, determination stiffening his limbs as he readied himself for the inevitable onslaught, for clever words to twine around his heart and attempt to pry loose his resolve.

‘Blue.’

A blink of confusion. ‘I beg your pardon?’

‘A most singular shade, coal-fringed, and occasionally - as now - lit like a coming storm.’

Buffeted by confusion, Will grasped at acerbity as tightly as he was clinging to the doorframe. ‘You’ve come here to describe my eyes? How very trite, Doctor.’

If the insult stung, Hannibal didn’t show it. ‘Bâtard-Montrachet Grand Cru,’ he purred, moving just a fraction closer.

Brow creasing, Will snapped, ‘What is this, Hannibal? Did you come all this way for a pop quiz?’

‘An answer.’ Eyes gleaming in a determination that Will recognised well - a determination that usually ended with him moaning and begging, sending a jolt through him, even now.

Hannibal took a couple of steps forward, just one short of invading Will’s space altogether. ‘Or rather, a series of answers.’ A pause, a slight softening of tone. ‘Answers that I should have supplied days ago, weeks ago really, had I not fought you so hard as you tried to pry them out of me.’

Will recognised the wariness twined around that delicious determination, an almost respectful acknowledgement of the viciousness Will had locked and loaded inside him. It was hard to ignore the scent of him, how it wrapped around him like a lover’s embrace, causing his heart to knock against his ribs. At the note of apology in Hannibal’s voice, Will recalled their final fraught conversation, the questions he had peppered Hannibal with like rapid-fire.

‘What’s your favourite colour? …Favourite wine?’

‘Who was the first person you ever loved?’

That decidedly one-way conversation.

‘I see.’ Will crossed his arms and glared. ‘And, what? Am I supposed to find this charming?’

‘Charm is but a gossamer game of perspective, Will, but one can hope.’ Just the hint of an - *alright admit it* - charming smile. After a pause, Hannibal added, ‘although I don’t recall charm being one of the qualities listed in the most recent version of my publisher’s biography. I must say, your revisions took an… interesting turn.’

‘I may have improvised a little.’

Hannibal quoted softly, ‘*Doctor Lecter’s fear of intimacy may come as a surprise to his readers, but one must hope that his penchant for starting things he cannot finish is restricted to his personal life rather than his professional service*.’

Tartly, Will rejoined, a reluctant grin just peeking through, ‘You forgot about, *For a psychiatrist so profoundly aware of his own impeccable taste, manner, and intellect, he has restricted his understanding of the human psyche to discount anyone actually liking him for what might be underneath*.’ Threw out a shrug he knew would provoke. ‘But at least it’s only a matter of adjusting the prose. You should be grateful that I didn’t litter the thing with typos as well.’

‘Hm.’ It came out as a dangerous purr. ‘Would that the same could be said of your resignation letter.’ Hannibal leaned forward as he spoke, the faintest glimmer of steel beneath his words serving as a tantalising echo of their old dynamic. ‘The omission of an apostrophe might be considered an understandable oversight, but the full stop, Will? Positively audacious.’

‘You know me,’ Will rejoined gruffly. ‘I scorn predictability.’ Narrowed eyes, a coy smile of attack. ‘And I love a red pen.’

‘I do know you.’ The pretence of witty banter suddenly dropped, Hannibal’s gaze became strangely earnest. Will’s breath caught. The brush of gloved fingers against his cheek was fleeting, as was the hint of sorrow in amber eyes. ‘As you know me, Will. *See* me. Even though I tried not to let you.’

‘I see you, Hannibal, and I choose you because of what I see.’ Cold steel splitting skin, hot blood smearing in a kiss, bodies joined in savage exultation.

Everything everything everything.

‘Tell me why,’ Will breathed, unsteady.

A beat as Hannibal considered. ‘Perhaps because the guidance one dispenses is so often the first to be personally disregarded.’ Eyes locked on his, somehow guarded and open all at once. ‘To believe you could truly want this… after seeing me so completely…’ A slight shake of his head, a recalibration after halting words. ‘Perhaps in the end it was merely fear, something I have not felt in a very long time.’ Truth at last, like an offering.

Hannibal was so close to him now, only a whisper of air preventing Will from being consumed, whole and entire. Hannibal’s smile was soft, hopeful. ‘Or perhaps it was simply the old adage of setting something free, and seeing if it will return to you, over and over again.’

‘Say it, Hannibal.’ Will’s voice was a hoarse whisper against parted lips. ‘Please.’

‘Love.’ Hannibal breathed into him with a soft smile. ‘He pays you a visit or he doesn’t.’

Everything.

Will swallowed around the lump in his throat, the ember that had kindled in his heart flaring incandescent at Hannibal’s words. They threatened to overwhelm him entirely, prompting one last attempt at coy retreat, ‘What was it you wrote in your book, Doctor Lecter? *You cannot control with respect to whom you fall in love* ? I still think the phrasing needs work, by the way.’

‘Rude.’ Eyes glittering with amused tenderness, Hannibal reached for Will’s hand. ‘How fortunate for you that I love you to such utter distraction, I seem to be strangely willing to overlook all manner of lapses in politeness.’

Will snorted. ‘When was I *ever* polite… *Sir* ?’ But his fingers threaded through Hannibal’s even as he brought up his other hand to curl around his lover’s neck and tug him down, insistent.

Their lips met and clung then parted, tongues touching, passing sweetness like nectar between them. Will moaned into the kiss, famished, greedy for the taste. *His* taste. When Hannibal shoved him backwards almost roughly, pinning him against the door frame, Will grinned and pressed closer. Broke the kiss to scent at Hannibal’s smooth jawline, bestow a daring nip at a cold earlobe. Hannibal growled and released Will’s hand, only to grip the curves of his ass and hoist him up.

Groaning in approval, Will wrapped his legs tightly around Hannibal's waist. Pressed worshipful kisses down the curve of Hannibal's neck as he was carried into the house.

'Now, where was I? Ah yes. My childhood home was a castle in the southeastern region of Lithuania.' Kisses punctuated this absurd revelation, and Will couldn't help but laugh around kisses of his own, joy bubbling up between them, almost giddy.

'Of course you did. And I bet it was surrounded by wolves and impenetrable forests.'

Hannibal's chuckle rumbled against his neck. 'Almost as if you'd seen it for yourself.' It was as if he would devour him whole, and Will already knew he was lost… and found.

But suddenly Hannibal stopped, pinning him to the wall with his weight, just as tightly as his eyes pinned his gaze, hands coming to cup his face. This time the laughter had left his voice, leaving behind only truth.

'And outside of my family, the first person I have ever loved is *you*, Will. Only you. Forever you.'

A soft noise of anguish escaped Will, and he sought Hannibal's mouth again as he whispered urgently against it, 'Please mean it. Because I love you too. And I only realised in these last few days just how much. God, I never knew that it could be like this.'

'Like what?' Softly, lips teasing Will's apart.

Half-laughing, half-sobbing, Will broke off to press his forehead to Hannibal's. 'A damned revelation. You showed me who I am. Instead of shame, you showed me beauty and power. You made me whole, Hannibal, and I want to do the same for you… Sir.'

Another kiss, fierce, bruising, before Hannibal pulled back with a glow that was almost luminous. He gently but firmly released Will, who had trouble keeping his feet under him. For a moment, they swayed together, quickened heartbeats beating now in perfect time.

'You already have, Will. A hundred times over. Now, if you'll let me, I'll spend the rest of my life showing you just how perfect you are.'

Heart full, Will nodded, forehead against Hannibal's. They stayed like that for a breath, two, savouring each other, until…

'On your knees, Will.'

Without hesitation, Will sank to his knees on the carpet in front of the fireplace, relief washing through him in cool waves as he assumed the stance that Hannibal had taught him when they had first started this dance: head up, knees wide and set, back straight, arms clasping his elbows behind him. Finding his centre, finding his *purpose*, reclaiming it. Reclaiming *him*. With a subtle smile of approval, Hannibal studied him closely, walking a slow circle around him, fingers trailing across his throat sending shivers up his spine.

'Beautiful. Now, wait there for me. And do not move.'

Flushed, happy, Will tilted his chin a fraction higher, stiffened his shoulders. And waited.

When Hannibal opened the door and disappeared outside, for one heart-stopping moment Will considered what he would do if he heard the sound of the Bentley's engine roar to life, of it being

driven away.

You know exactly what you would do. You would wait. Without moving. Without questioning. For him. For both of you.

Because if this was a test, Will would be damned if he would prove himself anything less than perfect.

But soon after, Hannibal returned with something that he held clasped behind his back. He came to stand again in front of Will; and as he had so many times before, Will focused on controlling his breathing, checking his posture beneath that piercing gaze, desperate to give Hannibal his fill as he quietly hummed his approval. Finally, Hannibal brought out what he had concealed, placing it on the floor squarely in front of Will, solid and undeniable. Will had to bite back a sob.

His collar. Well-worn and plain, simple leather, but holding so much significance in this place, after all this time.

Hannibal watched him quietly for a little while longer, as Will stared at the collar lying at Hannibal's feet, understanding fully what Hannibal was asking of him - that he should consider fully what he was waiting for, *who* he was waiting for. His Dom, his Sir, the man who would own him completely.

Yes. Yes.

Hannibal said nothing, simply brushed back a lock of Will's hair from his forehead before moving away again.

Stay.

Hannibal walked towards the kitchen with a sharp whistle for the dogs, barely sparing Will another glance, leaving him to his command and contemplation. Determined in his obedience, secure in his choice, Will focused on maintaining his posture, feeling the familiar comfort in routine spread through his limbs, mingled now with the warmth of Hannibal's words on his lips and in his heart.

I love you.

Dreamy unreality mingled with the keen mounting edge of a desire repressed for too many days. He listened as faint noises started coming from the kitchen: the refrigerator door opening and closing, a knife on wood, the scraping of something into a bowl - no, several bowls, which were set down on the tiled floor before Hannibal muttered indistinctly and the scuffling of dogs' paws indicated that he had given them leave to begin eating. *He's feeding them, and they respect him already*. Tender amusement followed, and shortly afterwards when Hannibal swept past him again, the dogs whining enthusiastically at his heels, Will had to restrain himself from whimpering his own gratitude and desperate *want*.

How long Hannibal was outside, Will wasn't sure; he just let himself drift, finally secure in his place, secure in his ability to pass this test. The collar in front of him was all the surety he needed, just one more test, but one that proved their love for each other over and over and over, even before they had known what it was, *accepted* what it was. Hannibal's words from those first days floated in his mind.

A lesson in care.

Will floated, above the growing ache in his knees and the tingle in his fingers, above any racing of his mind, content just to listen and wait and obey. He swayed a little on his knees, but caught himself each time as the minutes ticked by. And when finally the screen door opened again, and Hannibal stepped inside, cheekbones slashed red with chill, hair just slightly wind-ruffled, Will wanted to weep at the beauty of the man.

'I've settled the dogs in the barn. They will be happy enough there for a time. And I would have your undivided attention.'

Peeling off his gloves, Hannibal folded them into his coat pockets before unwinding the light scarf from around his neck and unbuttoning his coat. Every movement precise, economical, a practice in grace. Only when he had hung up his coat did he turn his gaze back to Will, and Will caught something in his eyes that his heart ached to see, tucked away behind the cool command - it was a kind of *wonder*, as if part of him couldn't believe that Will still knelt for him, still here, still tangible, still *his*. Still fighting for them. And in that second, Will realised that even if Hannibal had left him here for hours, for days, he would have waited, secure in his place, in his belonging, knowing deep in his soul that he would *never* stop fighting for them, that all he needed to do was trust in their mutual devotion and Hannibal's exacting commands. The rush of comfort and heat that flushed through him at that revelation pricked at the backs of his eyes and made his cock fill.

Hannibal mustered himself quickly, Will's obvious arousal darkening that intense gaze. Crossing to stand in front of him, he cupped Will's jaw in his hand, thumb stroking in time with every fond word.

'How good you are for me. So strong, so beautiful.'

Will leaned into the touch, into the praise. But he remained silent. Although Hannibal hadn't forbidden him from speaking, he felt he was already beyond words. And until it was explicitly given, Will would wait for permission to speak. Overflowing with the desire, the visceral ache, to *please*.

One final lingering caress as Hannibal tilted his chin so that their eyes met, as he searched his face, earnest once more.

'Tell me one last time, Will. Is this what you really want? My only command in this moment is that you are truthful - with me, but mostly with yourself. I ask so much of you, *have* asked so much of you… to be my lover, my submissive, my friend, my confidant, my mirror, my *everything*…' a small ironic laugh, 'even my secretary. And you've been all that and more. I still ask for you to be all those things, and from this moment forward I vow to prove myself worthy of those gifts. But you must tell me, are you sure it's what you really want?'

Will met Hannibal's gaze with every bit of open willingness he could muster.

'Sir… It's all I've *ever* wanted, for both of us.'

The glow in Hannibal's eyes was all-consuming. Will had a moment to consider how he could ever have mistaken it for anything other than exactly what it was.

'I love you, Will.'

The words were weighted with tenderness. And when Will felt Hannibal slip his old collar around his neck, buckling its familiar weight against his throat, he felt he could have floated away on a

cloud of belonging.

‘Do you want me to be gentle?’ Whispered words as Hannibal came to stand before him once again. ‘I would, if you asked it of me.’

Will’s heart clenched at the offering, and he gazed up with eyes brimful of reverence. ‘Hannibal, what I want is *you*, all of you. Every facet, every desire, every violence, every whim. You have always known exactly how to give me what I need, and what I need is you, whole and entire. I would never ask you for anything less. I trust you, Hannibal. With my body, and with my heart.’ And on a juddering breath, ‘I’m yours.’

Everything. Everything. Everything.

‘How could I have ever denied you?’ Hannibal’s voice was low, tender. ‘You hold me in the palm of your hand, Will Graham. You always have.’

Rendered mute by emotion, Will chose to push his luck as far as he could. Holding Hannibal’s eyes, he leaned in, pitching forward on his knees as Hannibal stood before him, slowly enough that Hannibal could put a stop to his presumptuousness at any point. Instead he simply watched with avid hunger as Will dipped to nuzzle his face against Hannibal’s cock, caged inside fine wool.

Will was immediately rewarded with a sharp intake of breath and the instant gratification of swelling flesh. Emboldened, Will unclasped his elbows to reach up, fingers trembling at Hannibal’s belt, hovering in question as he looked up through his lashes to catch and hold that ravenous gaze.

‘Let me, Sir. Please let me.’

Hannibal seemed beyond words, eyes shining with awe and blazing with hunger, breath heavy and lips parted. Will held his own breath, biting at his lower lip in anticipation. Finally the barest hint of a nod, long fingers sliding against Will’s scalp all the permission he needed, tightening in his curls to pull a heavy groan from him as he eagerly worked at Hannibal’s belt, tugging at his pants and boxers and shoes to toss them aside. Will looked up, trembling as he made himself wait while Hannibal slowly loosened his tie and pulled it off, eyes of molten amber never leaving his own as he unbuttoned his shirt, sliding it from broad shoulders to stand naked and proud in the sunset glow of the windows like some gilded deity.

Hannibal’s heavy cock stood insistent, waiting for him, and Will didn’t hesitate, grasping the thick length to touch his lips to the tip with a satisfied sigh, his tongue dipping to taste the slit. Hannibal bucked against his lips, fingers gripping tighter in his hair as he pushed deep into his mouth. The sound Hannibal released went straight to Will’s already throbbing cock, and Will moaned around the thick length already pushing at the back of his throat.

Salt and musk, flesh pulsing harder with every swipe of his tongue, Hannibal’s cock slid spit-slick in his mouth, messy, fucking into him, controlling his breath, obliterating everything in the world that wasn’t *him him him*… And Will exalted in it, swallowed him down, humming around him, triumphant at Hannibal’s reactionary groans. Centred by the fists still gripped tight in his hair, the scent of their mingled arousal, the glorious weight of the cock in his mouth, filling him up, Will felt as if his life had finally snapped into place, gratitude and love flooding him completely.

But suddenly not even this was enough. Suddenly, Will needed Hannibal inside him, needed to offer himself up, to be used and filled so entirely as to leave no space between them. Yearning for more, Will pulled off as, panting, he demanded without shame.

‘I need you to fuck me. *Now*.’

Almost tender the way Hannibal gazed down at him, even with his eyes ablaze and a growl on his lips; how tight was the twisting of his fingers in Will’s curls, a harsh but indulgent warning, pulling a sharp gasp. A flash of a coy smile before Will dutifully lowered his eyes, modulating his tone to deference even as he panted.

‘Please. Sir.’ Each word an emphatic plea, but love-drenched all the same.

Instantly he was tugged up, surprising rusty laughter which broke free from him as he was swept clear off his feet into Hannibal’s arms. Hannibal spared him a look of mild admonishment for the infraction - or perhaps his acceptance of it - but swept in to capture his mouth in a deep kiss, holding him close as he carried Will to the bed.

Content for Hannibal to take the lead, Will subsided into pliancy as his clothes were peeled off, every inch of him cherished as Hannibal cradled him, kissed him, reclaimed him, taking small nips of his flesh, fingers searching, murmuring praise that Will felt more than heard. Will let himself revel in it all, his need mounting until he was squirming and writhing under Hannibal’s touch, moaning extravagantly for *more more more*.

Hannibal didn’t stop him as Will ran his hands along strong shoulders, his back, through tawny hair, up muscular arms that braced on either side of him. Emboldened, he couldn’t stop himself from letting his hands wander down Hannibal’s chest, the scratch of hair under his fingernails making his mouth water, finding nipples to trace and rub and pinch, earning him a sharp inhale, even as Hannibal suddenly pulled him up to straddle his lap.

Bending, Will tasted one rigid nub, earning him the full moan he was after. Hannibal’s thick cock prodded his ass, and he rocked against it, his own erection insistent, sliding deliciously against Hannibal’s hair-roughened belly.

‘Tell me you have -’

‘Top drawer,’ Will cut in, hiding a smile at the note of strain in Hannibal’s voice, the uncharacteristic tremor in his hand as he reached blindly for the bottle of lubricant.

But once the bottle was uncapped, the contents poured into Hannibal’s palm, there were no more words, only their rough breaths and urgent touches, Will whining his impatience as he fucked himself back on Hannibal’s fingers. And when finally he felt the blunt press of Hannibal’s slicked cock to his hole, he settled his hands on Hannibal’s shoulders and groaned long and loud as he was filled one slow, wonderful inch at a time.

‘Oh god, *Will*.’

Mouths brushing, his name a vow. A slow rhythm started that wrung deep moans from them both, desperate and languid at once, true decadence and pure torture in equal measure. Will let it wash over and through him, surrendering completely to everything that Hannibal was giving him, tears glistening in his eyes as his head tipped back, sharp teeth and soft lips at his throat, hands gripping his hips tight enough to bruise. The wash of sensations, tenderness and pain, love and ownership, surrender and power, all of it felt new and whole and beautifully strange. It felt like…

Home.

‘*Hannibal*.’

Will’s fingers tightened on Hannibal’s shoulders, hips rising and falling, body tightening around the cock that drove into him, slow but merciless, relentlessly massaging that sweet spot deep inside him until he moaned and begged, until he couldn’t help but shout for *more, harder* - babbling pleas of *Sir, fuck, let me come, please let me come on your cock*.

With a ferocious growl, Hannibal pushed him onto his back, looming over him with eyes black as blood, only to grasp his hips and enter his body again in one brutal thrust, and Will thought dazedly that he could quite happily die right then and there.

But he didn’t die. Will held on, rocking with each savage thrust, impaling himself on the thickness of Hannibal’s cock, fisting the bedcovers as hoarse cries were punched out of him, as his body and mind soared with belonging and triumph. And when Hannibal’s hand closed around his desperate, leaking cock, it took only the deep rumble of *come for me* to make him arch off the bed and paint his belly white with seed.

Will’s release clamped down around Hannibal’s thick length, and he felt the warm, pulsing rush of Hannibal’s release marking him deep inside - *yours* - as his deep open-mouthed cry echoed through the room, on and on, until they were both left shuddering through the aftershocks, wrapped tight in each other’s arms, tears and smiles warm on their lips, love blazing between them.

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Eventually, Hannibal left Will lying in a comfortable, boneless heap, nestled in the warm, rumpled sheets that smelled of sex and sweat and *them*. Clad only in his trousers, Will watched him stride out into the brisk evening air, making fast work of bringing the dogs inside, ushering them back into the warmth of the house. Will had never seen him looking so… domestic. So at ease. All the trappings of his well-crafted person suit lying in a rumpled heap on the floor. Making a brief detour back to the bed, Hannibal dropped a kiss on Will’s forehead before heading off again - upstairs, this time - and Will smiled as he heard the distant sound of running water.

‘We’re having a bath?’ Raising his head, Will blinked bemusedly up at Hannibal’s once again naked form as he padded silently back to the bed and held out his hand. ‘Now?’

‘Now,’ was the firm reply, and before Will could comment further he was scooped up into Hannibal’s arms and carried to the stairs. ‘I have every intention of fully indulging myself by taking care of you. So you might as well save your objections.’

‘No objections,’ said Will, sighing happily and curling close as he rubbed his cheek against Hannibal’s shoulder. ‘As long as you’re coming in with me.’

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‘Tell me about this one.’

Setting aside the empty jug, Hannibal bent to press a kiss to the circular scar on Will’s shoulder. He had examined each and every mark on Will’s skin, asked the story of each and every one. Will had remembered them all, and for the first time in his life, had felt they were truly beautiful in someone’s eyes. Maybe even in his own.

Will hummed, running a hand through curls freshly-rinsed before settling back against Hannibal’s chest in the big claw-foot tub.

‘Battle trophy.’ His lips twisted in a humourless smile. ‘And pretty much the reason I first came to you.’

‘Because you had almost died?’

Hannibal wrapped his arms around Will’s waist, a protective gesture, and automatically Will settled his hands atop Hannibal’s, threading their fingers together.

‘Because I put an entire clip into the man responsible.’ Hazy images rose, unbidden, from the steaming water. Hobbs, gun in one hand, dripping knife in the other, wild-eyed and defiant as he stood over the body of his slain daughter. The pop and sting of the bullet that tore through muscle and sinew when Will raised his own gun; the deafening rush of blood and adrenaline as he fired and fired and fired, peppering Hobbs who staggered backwards, a grotesque marionette, before the strings were cut and he slumped to the floor, blank stare fixed on his puppeteer. Will’s throat worked. ‘And I liked it.’

‘Hm.’ Warm breath caressed Will’s nape. ‘Tell me, Will, is the world better off for this man’s end?’

Will’s eyes hardened. ‘He was a serial killer. His last victims were his own wife and child.’

‘And how did you feel as you watched him die?’

‘Righteous.’ The word a low hiss.

Hannibal’s lips feathered a kiss over his cheek. ‘To revel in a righteous act is nothing to be ashamed of, Will. If it is any consolation, I would have done the same. And I would have liked it.’ Hot breath at his ear sent a shiver through him. ‘You have nothing to reproach yourself for.’ A smile behind an even lower growl. ‘And you can leave any punishment to me.’

Gratitude rose hot in Will’s chest, melting the tension that thoughts of Hobbs had conjured, perhaps for good. Turning his head, he caught Hannibal’s mouth with his own, and they kissed soft and slow.

‘Thank you,’ he whispered, lying back again with a contented sigh and a rueful smile. ‘You know, maybe you are a pretty good psychiatrist after all, no matter what your new biography might say. Maybe I should sign up for a few sessions.’

‘Or you could marry me and enjoy the benefit of our special brand of *sessions* free of charge.’

Will’s breath hitched, heart kicking against his ribs as the words hung between them, but when he replied he was careful to match Hannibal’s lightly teasing tone, both of them doing a poor job of hiding the feeling behind their words.

‘And spend my honeymoon tied to a tree in the middle of nowhere? Maybe we should take this one step at a time, Sir.’

‘Hm.’ Teeth grazed at his earlobe. ‘Does that mean tying you to a tree is off the table?’

Will shivered, cock stirring. ‘I don’t think anything is off the table for us, Hannibal.’

And grinned as he felt the unmistakable evidence of Hannibal’s rising enthusiasm for his answer. His voice, rough with naked awe, whispered in Will’s ear, sending shivers of belonging down his spine.

‘What grace have I, to fall so in love?’

Will felt those words in every atom of his being, finally a part of something greater than himself, as if he had somehow touched the sky and the soil and the blood of the earth… and he loved him back.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks so much again to our dear readers for your seemingly infinite patience with us! Your many sweet comments and words of encouragement have meant the world to us as we've worked to get this chapter done through some crazy times. We can't believe we're almost to the end!

We promise the last chapter (just the coda left!) won't be long behind! Stay tuned and hit that subscribe button ❤️

As always, kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are magical and we thank you for leaving them 🙂

You can find us over on Twitter @MyDesignHanibl and @fragile_teacup and on Tumblr at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup.

Chapter 10: Coda

Chapter Summary

> New rhythms, new commitments, new promises. Decadence and domesticity merge as Hannibal and Will explore their new life together.

Chapter Notes

> Thanks to everyone for your incredible support of this fic (and your endless patience)! We've been living for all your comments and kudos and boosts since the very start. We're hope it was worth the wait for this final chapter! 🖤🔥

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Six months later.- Baltimore

Will slipped the wide end of the tie through his fingers, brown paisley silk smooth against his skin. Beneath his palm, even through pin-striped cotton, he could feel Hannibal's heart start to beat a fraction faster. He'd just woken Will from his sleepy sprawl across the huge bed in the Baltimore house, drawing him up to his knees, the tie held out for him its own gentle command. Will relished every quickened beat with a satisfied smile.

'I love that you still get such a kick out of this. Double Windsor?'

'Of course.' Wolfish eyes tracked him, a warm finger grazing the waistband of his boxers. 'Seems I'm not the only one.'

Will grinned but got to work. Echoes of the first time in Hannibal's office, when he had been so nervous and aware, aching with a need he hadn't understood… hadn't known how to express.

Under, up and through; across, up and under. It had been almost a mantra then, to keep his hands from shaking. Now merely a grounding, laced with warm purpose. Belonging.

'And why would I not enjoy such a thing?' Hannibal regarded him with lazy indulgence, chin tilted to allow Will to work more efficiently. 'When it allows me the pleasure of keeping you close for a few minutes longer before I must leave.'

'Sweet words,' Will teased, easing the wide knot into place, eyes intent as he folded down the shirt collar and made a few final minor adjustments (*suspenders straight, parallel… check; silver stag-head cufflinks secure…check),* satisfaction at a job well done curling warm in his belly, as it did every morning when they enacted the same routine, whether here or in Wolf Trap. 'But whether or not you *must leave* this morning is up for debate in my opinion, *Doctor*.'

A taunting grin. 'My darling Will, that savours strongly of bitterness. Tomorrow we'll be in Wolf Trap, just the two of us, and I for one would rather not come home to a week's worth of messages from Mr. Froideveaux. Given the urgency of his message -'

'His *whining*, you mean.'

'- it seemed only prudent to allow him one more session before we leave, unless my phone rings enough times that I'm forced to do something I'm not sure you'd approve of.' Warm hands cupped his cheeks, amber eyes finding his own, the flash of devilish warmth in them never failing to make Will's toes curl. 'Besides which, it gives me great pleasure when you help me to get ready for work. We'll leave for Wolf Trap in the morning.'

'*First thing* in the morning.' Will's glare might have chastened any other mortal but he couldn't muster any real venom. 'Given how Franklyn fawns over you, you'd think the spectacle that was last Saturday would have made him think twice before demanding a session so soon.'

'What a novel way to describe our wedding, Will.'

Wedding. We're married. This man is my husband.

Will couldn't stop repeating it in his head, over and over, the mental equivalent of pinching himself as he surreptitiously spun his new wedding band around his finger. He couldn't help grinning either, enjoying Hannibal's quelling stare and the stern set of his beautiful mouth. Deciding to take pity on him, stepping in close.

‘The wedding *spectacle* was wonderful, Hannibal.You know I loved it.’

Tone soft with the sincerity of his words. The entire event had been stunning. Held at Mccluster Hall, one of Hannibal’s favourite artistic haunts, the entire concert hall bought out and bedecked for *the society event of the season* . Will had amused himself no end during Hannibal’s meticulous planning, teasing him mercilessly about his ‘ravenous fan club’ and their rabid anticipation of what *Dr. Hannibal Lecter’s wedding* would be like. Headed, of course, by a champagne-clutching Ms Komeda, bafflingly wrapped head to toe in white Valentino for the evening. Hannibal had rolled his eyes at the colour choice, Will catching him with a snicker, the two of them enjoying their silent conversations and private amusement all evening.

No, Hannibal had far from disappointed the glitterati of Baltimore… and certainly not Will. They had both agreed that each of them should have exactly the union they wanted: in Hannibal’s case, the public extravagance of a large and opulent wedding, declaring for all the world that Will was *his*. In turn, he’d promised Will that ‘*something private, just for us*’ would follow shortly in Wolf Trap, exactly as Will had hoped.

If he was honest, Will hadn’t expected to enjoy the big wedding as much as he had, but he’d been won over in spite of himself. The warmth of Hannibal’s gaze, the proprietary hand that had settled at the base of his spine, whisking him away from the ravenous hordes, out onto the dance floor where the world had fallen away, Hannibal’s steadying body pressed against him. Hannibal hadn’t taken his eyes off him all night, not for a second.

His.

And, of course, the ceremony itself. Walking towards each other from opposing aisles, meeting halfway under the celebrant’s benevolent gaze. Eyes locked on each other in mutual veneration. Exchanging vows stripped of artifice, devout in their simplicity, laced with their own private meaning. Exchanging rings (brushed platinum, Cartier). Beneath his suit, Will had worn his training collar, a secret reassurance and concealed centring that had carried him through the unrelenting attentions of Hannibal’s society flock.

No, it had been wonderful. Will may have joked and teased, but he had secretly thrilled at it all, despite the whirlwind of glittering, curious faces, despite the lavishness and expense. And there had been more than a few ‘moments of solace’ that had been worth every second, some reunions he’d never forget or trade for the world.

Jack and Alana had both looked so happy for him, having finally accepted that he was truly never coming back to the FBI. Bev had actually elbowed him in the ribs with a wink and asked him just how the hell she could meet someone who ‘looked at her like that’, grinning as Will felt himself flush. Jimmy and Zeller had gawked at every decoration and decadent hors d'oeuvre, all the while bickering at each other to act ‘natural’ amongst the finery. Will had laughed - easy, natural - as they’d tugged him into a tight but awkward hug, their congratulations spoken over each other. It had felt good that they had come, their support - and yes, maybe even their relief at his having landed on his feet - palpable, but something Will had entirely understood.

A particularly delicious pleasure had been catching Bedelia du Maurier glaring up at the five-tiered wedding cake, as if by sheer force of will alone she could have wrenched apart the tuxedoed figurines entwined atop. The look on her face had been priceless when Will had winked at her, caught somewhere between outrage, petulance and resignation as Hannibal had swept him off yet again to the dance floor without a word.

Who's on the other side of the veil now, Bedelia?

'Wishing for your scalpel Will?' Hannibal had whispered in his ear with dark amusement.

'I think Bedelia knows when she's beaten. Although I could come up with a few other ways a scalpel might be fun - maybe tonight?' Will had grinned at the low growl he could feel more than hear, Hannibal pressing even harder against him, absolutely stunning in his tux. 'Besides, I'd more likely need to use it to get us out of here. These people can't get enough of you. But you're *all mine* now.'

'I've been yours since the day you walked into my office, Will. But you… I can't wait to show you all the ways you belong to me, for the rest of our lives.'

Everything. Everything. Everything.

Will couldn't believe just how right it had all felt. How *right* it felt to wake up beside Hannibal every morning, whether in Wolf Trap or Baltimore, adapting to new rhythms as they settled into each other. Will was still glowing from everything that had happened, the entirety of the last six months like a warm dream, one he never wanted to wake up from. It had all been perfect.

Kneeling here now, on the edge of the bed, with Hannibal gazing down at him, tie perfect, Will marvelled at how they had finally found their way to each other. And soon it would be just the two of them, alone in Wolf Trap. An orbit of two.

'There shall be no ravenous fan club in the country, Will,' Hannibal reminded him softly, practically reading his thoughts as always, slipping his arms around Will's waist. A marked contrast between Will's worn t-shirt and boxers and Hannibal's primly pristine presentation. 'I'll have you all to myself.' Drawing his nose alongside Will's, 'and I'll enjoy every single minute.'

Interest in talking quickly waned as Hannibal brushed softly, but insistently, against Will's mouth. Will nudged closer still, lips parting in mute invitation, hands sliding to curl around Hannibal's suspenders. Wanting but content to wait, allowing Hannibal to choose the moment when he should give in, allow himself to be devoured. A warm tongue tip touched the bow of Will's lip and he closed his eyes on an exhale, his entire being focused on this moment, this man. His lover. His husband. His *Sir*. Making an art of obedience, here within the confines of their home (and the office, of course, once Will had - formally, and to Hannibal's delight - retracted his resignation). Neither of them were interested in a lifetime of unending or public deference, both enjoying the delicious friction of differing opinions and fearless independence as they navigated their dynamic through the unfamiliar waters of cohabitation.

Their work routine was still in place (making the coffee, sorting the mail, feeding the orchids, polishing Hannibal's shoes at the end of each day, typing typing typing as always), a grounding in the familiar that Will craved. Hannibal's red pen, ever at the ready; Will, just as ready and eager for his penance. Relishing also the *un* expected: the purred instruction to clear Hannibal's schedule for the rest of the day, amber eyes devilish; Will's pleasure in provoking an occasional unscheduled lesson with the flogger or the paddle or the cane…

Their dynamic ever evolving as love and trust grew.

The instant Hannibal's lips touched his own, Will moaned softly, tilting his head to better allow the slide of Hannibal's tongue inside his mouth, claiming him anew, the firm press of his mouth a promise which on any other Saturday morning would have precipitated a much more heated

exchange. (*Fucking Franklyn Froideveaux*.) Determination to make Hannibal just as regretful as he was for this annoying interruption of their post-wedding haze made Will wanton in the return of those kisses, the plunge of his tongue and the press of his body. Gasping at the nip of teeth, heady at the taste of copper, the dig of fingernails as Hannibal lightly pinned his wrists behind his back. And as maddening as it was to have to pull back from the precipice, colour high and cock semi-hard, it was unquestionably gratifying to witness the savage light glinting in Hannibal's eyes and the reddened tinge to that sculpted mouth, a delightful casualty of Will's morning stubble. Hannibal would know exactly what he was trying to do, and Will couldn't wait for the retribution he knew would come later, throwing in a cheeky grin just to seal the deal.

'You'd better go, *Doctor* , or we'll have Mr Froideveaux clogging up the messages again. And believe me, my scalpel will find all new uses if he tracks us down in Wolf Trap.'

Will licked his lips, chasing the taste of his husband, a gesture met with a brief tightening of the grip around his wrists before Hannibal released him with obvious reluctance.

'If you would stop being such a delicious distraction, I might get further than the bedroom.'

'And where's the fun in that?'

'Brat.'

Hannibal smirked at him, giving him a not-so-gentle swat as he turned away. Will would never get over Hannibal's indulgence… the line he allowed him to tow further and further out, the delicious jolt whenever he chose to reel it back in and claim his due.

But the time for delaying tactics was over. Will slipped from the bed and headed for the walk-in dressing room. He retrieved Hannibal's jacket (single-breasted brown Italian wool) from its wooden hanger behind the door and returned, holding it out for his husband to slide his arms into. A quick flick with the clothes brush, a careful tucking in of a silk pocket square, and Will stood back to admire the effect he'd created. Understated elegance. That perfect refined facade. *A wolf among sheep*. He smiled again at his own whimsy… Hannibal was definitely rubbing off on him.

'There. All ready for your ravenous fan.'

Hannibal huffed a laugh. ' Careful, Will. Your own fan club is growing ever more ravenous with each passing day.'

As much as Will hated to admit it, it seemed to be true. Together, they had become a social force to be reckoned with. In return for quiet weekends spent at Wolf Trap, Will was content to step out every now and again - an art gallery opening here, a concert there - with Hannibal proud and possessive beside him, maintaining the illusion of well-mannered conventionality while their true natures smouldered inside them, amusing and thrilling in every way.

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'What a darling man our dear Hannibal has netted for himself,' cooed Mrs Komeda to whoever would listen at the charity dinner. 'So refined!'

Will, smiling his thanks demurely, smirking inwardly at the memory of what had happened only minutes before…

Hannibal dragging him into a marble-tiled bathroom stall, the butt plug Will had been wearing all evening still vibrating, his whole body shaking with need, unsure how he'd managed to endure the exquisite edging through the final three courses (Hannibal's warning grip warm on his thigh under the table, that shark's grin). Only when dessert was cleared away and the dancing begun had he finally turned to Hannibal, glassy-eyed with want, words of pleading trembling on his lips. His reward for suffering so beautifully a rough, deep fucking against the bathroom door, Hannibal's fingers jammed into his mouth to muffle his cries. And afterwards, strolling back into the ballroom with matching strides and polite smiles, all around them appreciative nods and fawning approval.

Hiding in plain sight.

***

Finally now turning to examine his reflection in the free-standing mirror, assessing Will's ministrations, Hannibal rewarded him with a smile.

'Beautifully done, Will. Now come, see me out.'

Will grinned, putting on an exaggeratedly demure tone , 'Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir.'

'Brat.'

Slipping his hand into Hannibal's with a sly grin, Will padded barefoot downstairs, soundless beside the creak of Hannibal's shining leather Oxfords, detouring briefly into the kitchen to collect the packed lunch that he'd prepared for him (trout gravadlax with dill, capers, and sour cream on fresh sourdough - the bread kneaded by Hannibal's capable hands, the fish caught and cured by Will just before the wedding).

They came together again in the foyer, Hannibal's briefcase already on hand for Will to slip the lunchbox inside. Another new routine from which he derived genuine pleasure, this dance of domesticity suiting them both. Except this time it was strange to be sending Hannibal off to the office without him.

Just a few hours until I have him all to myself again.

'That's the last of the trout, but I'll catch more when we're up in Wolf Trap… if you promise to make a batch of those croissants of yours.'

Hannibal's eyebrows shot up but there was a smile in his eyes. 'Are we bargaining, Will? It was you who insisted that we should share the cooking… an agreement I made reluctantly, I might add, despite your delicious creations.' Hannibal leaned in close, his voice a dark purr against Will's ear. 'The croissants will be the first thing I make, but who's to say I'll let you out of bed long enough to go fishing?'

Will's stomach twisted as a shiver raced up his spine. They couldn't get to Wolf Trap fast enough. He mastered himself enough to growl in response.

'Promises, promises, *Sir*.'

It earned him another nip to his earlobe and a dark huff of laughter.

Cooking together had become yet another fascinating and rewarding aspect of their conjoined lives, Will taking on the role of sous chef in Hannibal's kitchen most nights during the week after they returned from the office. Although just as often he would find himself ushered upstairs to a warm bath and a gentle command to relax for an hour. It was becoming easier. Letting go, falling into trust, wading into the quiet of his mind. Once, all he had needed was a stream. Now, all he needed was Hannibal.

And it worked both ways, Hannibal allowing Will to set the pace when they were in Wolf Trap: fishing, reading, walking in the woods with the dogs, seemingly content, also, to mostly hand over the culinary reins to Will during these idyllic days. But their real dynamic shone through in all the ways that mattered, Will just as likely to be pulled away from his cutting and chopping by strong hands and a firm command to get on his knees on the rug in front of the roaring fireplace, dinner forgotten in the haze of delicious submission.

They had found a new kind of balance these last months. Dividing their time between Wolf Trap and Baltimore, wrapped up in the mystery of one another, the pride they each took, even down to the food they prepared, meals sometimes carrying a hidden message, teased out over the course of an evening.

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'Red snapper, Will? Are you, by any chance, still angry about my editing choices yesterday?'

'You mean the letter that came back to me with more red than black? Now why would that have annoyed me?'

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'Pan-fried venison, served on a bed of wild rice, with asparagus tips and a red wine jus.' The meat sliced on the vertical with surgical precision. *'Do you forgive me, Will?'*

'Well, you have just served up hart on a platter…'

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Theirs had become a true partnership, lives and homes conjoined. Deriving pleasure from contrast, adapting to each other's needs, cracks of loneliness filled, shattered potential mended, that delicious dynamic folded into the rich tapestry of their lives.

Now, briefcase handed over, Hannibal looking every inch the respectable psychiatrist, Will twined his arms around those broad shoulders and pressed in for one last kiss, long and languorous. *Hurry home*. Groaning as fingers delved into his hair and tilted his head, allowing Hannibal to plunder his mouth until they were both bruised and panting.

'Shall I have the dogs brought over for you?' Hannibal's voice was passion-rough, eyes worshipful.

Dazed, Will shook his head. 'Peter still has them at the farm. They'll be settled there, and I actually asked him to keep them a little longer so it can just be the two of us for a couple of days.'

'Even so, if you wish to have them with you for the night, I can ask Cauldwell to fetch them.'

Such stubborn desire to cater to the least of Will's whims was deserving of another soft kiss.

‘I still can’t believe you hired a driver just to ferry the dogs around.’ Chuckling quietly. ‘Careful, Sir, or you’ll spoil me…’

‘Then I’ll have to take care not to spare the rod.’ A predator’s smile that drew another delicious shiver.

‘Do you need me to pick anything up for dinner? I’m sure Franklyn will pay good money to keep you late, and I have plenty of time.’

‘No need.’ Hannibal scooped up the key to the Bentley. ‘I have everything in hand.’

‘Very mysterious. What’s on the menu?’ As he opened the front door. *Time to let the world in again*.

‘Never ask.’ Hannibal stepped outside, turning on the top step with a wink. ‘Spoils the surprise.’

As the Bentley pulled away from the curb, Will closed the door, still feeling the glow of Hannibal’s presence, but already mentally running through his list of tasks to do before they left: write the last of the wedding thank you cards, pack their overnight bags, clear the fridge of perishables. It was hardly legion. And when he thought of what they *could* have been doing to fill the empty hours…

Fuck fucking Franklyn!

A curl of resentment and a sudden, rather wicked idea.

Why not?

Mood lifting, Will sauntered through to the kitchen. Coffee first, shave, shower, then he’d restore the bedroom to order.

While the coffee percolated (in a contraption even more convoluted than Will’s temperamental office nemesis), he grabbed his bag from the corner armchair. Hunting through it, he closed his fingers around what he was looking for and grinned.

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The thrumming beat of water on his skin chased away the last clinging tendrils of sleep. Flicking off the faucet, Will thrust fingers through his hair, slicking it back, water-weighted curls tangling at his nape, remembering how Hannibal had stepped into the shower behind him yesterday and taken the soap from his unresisting hand. By the time he had finished, Will was pink and clean and agonisingly hard. On a firm command he’d gone to his knees, lavishing greedy attention on Hannibal’s cock, hands clasped obediently behind his back. He’d been shaking with need by the time Hannibal had pulled him to his feet, slowly jerking him off as he fingered him open, stroking relentlessly until Will was moaning, insensible, forehead and palms pressed to the tile. He was begging by the time Hannibal had granted relief, finally sliding home, grip punishing on Will’s hips as he’d fucked him at a savage pace.

Looking down at the faint bruises, ghost marks of Hannibal’s fingertips, Will smiled. If he had his way, they’d be fresh again by nightfall.

In the dressing room, he ran a hand over the clothes that Hannibal had selected for him: beige chinos, blue button-down. Control tempered by respect for Will’s own choices.

Dressing was a matter of a few minutes. Next job: make the bed.

The first time they'd made it together, Hannibal teaching him exactly how it was to be done, Will had been somewhat bemused by the process of reassembling sheets and throws and pillows in just the right order. Not to mention the fucking bolster! Now he'd got it down to a fine art, felt that quiet pride in the quest for perfection.

Hospital corners folded, last pillow plumped, he smoothed down the coverlet.

Pristine. Perfect. Exact.

Will eyed the bed, considering.

Yeah, right in the middle should do it.

Hand closed around his trophy, he slowly uncurled his fingers...

Dog hair. A golfball-sized clump in a mish-mash of colours.

With a satisfied hum, Will tipped his hand and let the clump fall. Watched it drift downward to settle atop five hundred thread-count Egyptian cotton.

And smirked.

Your play Doctor Lecter.

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24 hours later - Wolf Trap

'Which answer is it you want to hear, *Sir* ?'

Will bit his lip around a brazen grin, knowing he wasn't in much of a position to bargain.

Hannibal stood a short distance away in the clearing, resplendent in the glow of the warm afternoon sun as it slanted through the trees. He didn't answer Will's question, merely surveyed the tableau before him as if he'd completed a masterpiece, one he clearly had every intention of savouring - *had* been savouring for some time now.

Rope wrapped tight around the knuckles of one fist, Hannibal gripped the thick length, legs astride the tail which coiled on the ground. Will watched as Hannibal's wolfish eyes slowly dipped to follow the rough twining rope that reached across the clearing, straight from his fist to where it wrapped in clever knots and loops around Will's naked body, binding him fast to his favourite birch tree.

The rope pinioned Will's wrists down at his sides, but also circled heavily around his shoulders and torso, coiling twice around his neck - temporarily taking the place of his collar which Hannibal had

removed. All of it was ingeniously connected back to the length wrapped tight in Hannibal's fist, those fingers tightening as Will watched, squeezing, pulling just a fraction, just enough that he could feel the tension singing along the tether between them, his bonds constricting like a snake, decadent and diabolical at once.

Hannibal's lip quirked in a devilish grin of his own.

'What is happening now and what is about to happen *is* an answer, Will. What I want is an admission.'

Rope rough around his throat, tightening around his chest, Will could feel the bliss singing through him, every nerve ending vibrating with heady danger. The welts on his ass stung against the unforgiving tree trunk, no doubt still red from the spanking he'd already received, the rough bark reminding him of every single merciless smack. He was incredibly hard, utterly exposed, the contrast between his base nudity and Hannibal's neat seersucker suit making his cock twitch. Hannibal. An elegant blade of a man, grace edged with savagery.

God, we couldn't have gotten here fast enough.

Like a dream playing out in waking life, the summer sun warm on his skin, tingling under the weight of Hannibal's gaze. Hannibal looked like a gilded mirage in the dying light of the day, beautiful and powerful and entirely in control, a deity descended to earth, Will's own personal god, yet bound to him just as surely and infinitely as he was bound to this tree.

Mine.

Not far away, the remains of their comfortable but elegant little picnic lay abandoned on the grass. Only a few of the gourmet hors d'oeuvres Hannibal had spent the morning making left uneaten on Will's mismatched china plates, scattered croissant crumbs the only remaining evidence of a promise fulfilled. The blanket was more than a little dishevelled from the beginning of this amusing game of interrogation.

Will could almost see the two of them there - how he'd laughed as Hannibal pulled him over his lap, demanding with mock imperiousness that it was time to confess just where the *dog hair on the bed* had come from, warming his ass with a few smart slaps that crescendoed until the grin on Will's face had slowly been replaced by breathy moans, his body squirming under Hannibal's palm. How Hannibal had cradled him in his lap afterwards, changing tactics, feeding him sanguinaccio dolce from his fingers. Such sweet coercion, purring his approval as Will had gotten increasingly hard, sucking at Hannibal's knuckles, greedy and shameless. The glint in Hannibal's eye as he'd hauled him suddenly to his feet, stripping him naked with startling efficiency, and stringing him up to the tree so quickly Will's head still spun, a dark growl making it clear that he'd gone unpunished long enough. The whole scene would have felt like a dream, an impossibly perfect vision of a life, had not the bite of the rope kept Will grounded in the here and now, the ring on his finger a promise of forever.

If this is a dream, I hope to never wake up.

Dream or no, Will wasn't going to let Hannibal win that easily, even tied to a tree. He let his lip curl, suggestive and goading - no need to bother hiding it now, good behaviour being far from from the point of this particular exercise. Will cast his gaze up through his lashes and let his tongue slowly snake out to lick his bottom lip, riding the razor's edge between demure and debauched. A

sharp current thrilled up his spine as Hannibal's gaze followed every movement, gripping the rope even tighter, spurring him on, avid and ravenous. Will fought to keep his voice light, taunting.

'Must I denounce myself as a brat while you still refuse to admit just how much you *love it* ?' He let his coy smile widen, just a fraction. That dog hair really had paid off for him a hundred-fold. 'As if an *admission* would have any bearing on what you're about to do to me.'

Hannibal's grin was positively feral as he began to stalk closer, slowly coiling the rope as he closed the distance between them. Will could hear the hemp sliding rough through Hannibal's palms, creaking tight around his knuckles, each deliberate step ratcheting up the tension. Sparking amber eyes locked him in place just as tightly as he was tied. Hannibal's tone was teasing but dark as he stopped just a step away; an apex predator toying with his meal.

'Why not appeal to my better nature?'

Hannibal eyed him up and down before closing the final distance between them. The gravity of him, so close now, coaxing Will's breath faster, heavier, making him realise just how tight the ropes were around his chest. When Hannibal pressed the full length of his body against him, it felt like an electric current completing its circuit, arcing through him, back arching as much as the bonds would allow against the rough bark. Will loosed a helpless groan, the rope harsh against his throat, fighting to keep himself steady enough to answer, growling out the words against Hannibal's cheek.

'I wasn't aware you had one. And who says I would change a single thing?'

Will sucked in a breath and bucked at his bonds as Hannibal nipped at his jaw, the loop around his neck tightening fractionally, the length twisting in Hannibal's fist. Hannibal's voice was a dark purr in his ear, but Will could hear the smile in it, the satisfaction.

'About my nature or what I'm about to do to you?'

Will melted into his bonds as they tightened once more around him. He could feel any ounce of coy control slipping away from him, stomach flipping *hard* as he heard the unmistakable metallic *shiiick* of Hannibal's knife opening. Hannibal brought it tight to Will's throat and looked him hard in the eye, the cold edge singing against his hot skin. Hannibal's knee pressed into his cock, Will's low groan turning quickly to a full throated moan as he felt the sharp bite of the knife tip at his neck, the warm trickle of blood trailing down his throat towards the tightening collar of rope. Hannibal dipped his head and Will felt the slick warmth of his tongue gathering up the drop of blood like an offering. Will could hear himself panting now, Hannibal's words hot against his skin, that tone undeniable as it resonated through to his core, dripping with honeyed command.

'I promised you a reckoning, Will. I want an answer.'

Will's head was spinning and he was so, so hard. Even in this state, he felt suddenly exultant, triumph thrumming through every nerve and vein. This was everything he'd been angling for, and not just with his bratty little dog-hair stunt. Their big wedding had been beautiful, a dream within a dream, but *this*, what was happening in this clearing, this was *them* in their truest form.

This time, the smile that spread across Will's face was entirely free, the same wild freedom that coursed through him even as the ropes tightened around him, stripped naked and held fast in the bonds of Hannibal's mercurial mercy, that iron command. Losing control, giving control, it was all the same to him now. He would give it up to Hannibal and let himself soar on the release of pure surrender.

He returned Hannibal's ravenous gaze with a look of open need, pressing his cock harder into Hannibal's weight, his voice choked yet clear against the knife that pressed to his throat, the ropes that gripped him, willing Hannibal to *see* the joy that sang in his veins, to taste it.

'Neither. I wouldn't change a thing. If you want an admission, Sir, it's yours, along with anything else you want to take from me. *I'm* yours.' Feeling the words, the truth behind them settling warm in his already molten gut, Will mustered one last coy grin, revelling in the high colour of triumph and adoration on Hannibal's cheeks. 'Besides, I had a feeling I'd spend our honeymoon tied to a tree.'

Hannibal's smile spread, sharp with diabolical intent. Will sucked in a gasp as Hannibal suddenly pulled the knife away from his throat and raised it, the blade glinting high in the sun before swooping down. Will couldn't help but flinch as Hannibal drove the knife into the tree a hair's breadth from his head, where it stuck and held. At almost the same moment, his other hand gripped Will's cock tight, all his defences overwhelmed in one coordinated attack.

'You will come when I say, Will. Not before.'

That iron tone, utterly undeniable. Will groaned as Hannibal leaned in to devour his mouth, teeth and tongue greedy, fist tightening as he began to stroke him, palm slick and hot as he gripped and twisted around his length, rough and merciless, purposefully perfect, dipping to tease and press at his hole, sending Will rushing towards release. He knew Hannibal would want him to beg for it, and beg he did, freely and without shame, his pleas and moans rising towards the open sky above as he surrendered utterly.

'Oh fuck, please Sir. Please. Fuck me, Show me I'm yours. Please.'

Hannibal kept up that merciless pumping, mouth dipping once, twice, to lap possessively at the trickling blood at Will's throat, to claim his mouth again and again in punishing kisses that tasted of copper and need. Will had never been as close to coming without permission as when Hannibal's voice growled hot and wet and bloody into his mouth.

'Mine.'

Will bucked into his fist and pleaded, utterly undone, as Hannibal unbuckled himself and freed his already hard cock, liberally slicking himself from the small bottle of lube in his pocket before tossing it away, eyes fixed on Will as he begged and panted, desperate for more, barely able to hold on. Hannibal didn't make him wait long, hoisting up his legs with both hands and wrapping them tight around his waist.

With a feral moan, Hannibal drove himself deep into Will's body in one slick, delicious push, punishing and possessive. Pain and pleasure, domination and surrender - all of it melding into one bright moment of startling fullness and perfection that had Will letting loose a cry that echoed to the tops of the trees.

Hannibal fucked him mercilessly until Will was hoarse from shouting and pleading for release, alternately straining and sagging against the tight ropes and Hannibal's arms, his muscles shaking, legs still wrapped tight around Hannibal's waist, unable to keep from rutting against him as if his very bones were aflame. Will could feel himself careening towards the edge, the taste of his own blood filling his mouth once more as Hannibal kissed and bit at his lips. The words were punched from him with each vicious thrust.

‘God. Please. Sir…Hannibal. Please… *let me come*.’

Hannibal’s growl was entirely savage as he bit down on Will throat and pounded into him, crying out as he emptied himself into Will’s body, one hot pulse after another, on and on as Will panted and begged and tried to hold on, even as the rope cinched tighter around him, cutting off his air. Still buried in him to the hilt, Hannibal reached up and pulled the knife out of the tree, slicing down in one elegant motion to sever a critical knot, catching Will’s weight as the rope slackened around his neck and shoulders and he gasped a shuddering breath. His feet were barely down on the ground before Hannibal dropped to his knees in front of him, fingers bruising his hips as he pushed him back against the tree, keeping him upright, that iron command ringing in his ears.

‘Come for me, Will.’

Will felt himself shaking apart, breaking and re-forming anew in a forge of pleasure and pain, gasping as Hannibal took his cock deep into his throat, devouring, swallowing him down as Will shouted his blistering climax, giving Hannibal *everything everything everything* …

Incandescent bliss.

Will drifted in it, that stream of light and dark, the wholeness of utter belonging washing over and through him, every nerve ending singing with sensation. He could feel Hannibal’s tongue lapping at his overstimulated cock, down the insides of his thighs, between his legs, gathering every drop of their release, tasting and consuming, offering and communion in one.

Slowly, Will felt himself coming back together, back to the world, back to Hannibal. The sun warm and low, dappled at first through his closed eyelids, then bright as he cracked them open. Hannibal rose slowly, body pressing against him, holding him up, holding him close, as he loosened the remaining ropes and let them slump to the base of the tree. Murmured endearments warm against Will’s skin, a litany of love and approval and belonging as every inch of him was checked over with infinite care. Hannibal finally grasped his face in both hands, searching his eyes as they finally cleared.

‘Perfect boy. I would give you everything, every day, forever, if only you’ll let me.’

Words difficult, Will simply pressed himself into Hannibal’s side as he was led back to the picnic blanket, gentle and slow. His legs were still shaky, but he could feel the strength and calm flowing back into him as he nuzzled against Hannibal’s neck, breathing in the smell of him, that solid presence. Will felt the soft blanket under his feet as Hannibal turned to face him, squeezing Will’s hands briefly before gently releasing him.

‘Kneel for me, Will. There is one more thing I would have from you.’

Will dropped immediately to his knees on the blanket, naked at Hannibal’s feet. Pulling the words out of himself, his throat still raw.

‘Anything. Everything.’

Hannibal smiled down at him, soft, searching. As if deciding something, he turned away, reaching down to pull a box from the bottom of the picnic basket. It looked like polished burlwood, the sun glinting off brass hinges and an elegant latch at the front. It wasn’t anything as small as a ring box, but still seemed like some kind of jewellery case.

Curiosity piqued, Will shifted slightly on his knees, but Hannibal's eyes fixed him once again as he stood before him, box held level with Will's gaze as he waited for Will to settle once more, to centre, to wait on his word. To trust.

Still, Will could feel his heart starting to beat faster as Hannibal took a deep, almost steadying breath, the obvious importance of whatever was happening beginning to press in on him, thrumming electric through his body, The intensity of Hannibal's gaze held him breathless, until finally he spoke, his words carrying the weight and sincerity of a long-awaited commitment.

'No one can be fully aware of another human being unless we love them. By that love we see potential in our beloved. Through that love we allow our beloved to see their potential. Expressing that love, our beloved's potential comes true.'

Hannibal thumbed open the latch on the box and slowly cracked it open, allowing Will to see what sat nestled there, a declaration on blood red velvet.

'I love you, Will.'

It was a collar. A smooth, masculine ring of solid, gleaming metal, rounded and smooth, with a single ring in front. It was a work of art in its simplicity, brutal and elegant at once, with seemingly no beginning and no end, like the ring on his finger, proclaiming one simple message.

Mine.

Will's breath caught in his throat as Hannibal held out the box for him to grasp in both hands. He looked from the collar up to Hannibal's searching gaze and back again. Waiting for Hannibal's explanation, heart pounding.

'This is a formal collar, Will, what some call an eternity collar. It is a recognition of mutual commitment, of deep devotion and respect on both sides. To me, it means an unbreakable forever, a declaration of love as solemn and as binding as any ring. I have never given one to another, and I never planned to. Until you.'

Hannibal slipped the collar from its nest, holding it up as Will let the box drift down to the ground, his eyes wide on Hannibal's own, astonished to see those amber eyes rimmed with light, the sun gilding caged tears. Around them, the clearing was awash with light, trees arching like pillars of the earth, limbed in gold, a living cathedral.

'You are ready for this, my beloved. You *deserve* it and you have earned it. You, *we*, are the truest realisation of potential I have ever encountered, and I would have you know it, every single moment you wear this collar – *my* collar. I hope you will choose to accept it, and wear it always.' A pause, uncharacteristic and full of weight. 'I hope you will choose to accept me.'

His. Mine.

Will couldn't yet find his words. He slowly reached out towards the collar, eyes looking to Hannibal for permission, for assurance. *May I?* His heart swelled at the warmth in those eyes, the hope there. An almost imperceptible nod.

Will suddenly felt the culmination of everything crashing into him as the tips of his fingers connected to the cool smoothness of the metal, a current that made his heart pound in his chest. Every moment, from bloodied knuckles and sleepless nights to the lull of calm and the scent of

shoe polish, from the first stroke of that damned red pen to the first electric crack of skin on skin, from the echo of Hannibal's voice when he'd said *I do* to this very moment - all of it thrummed through him in a flash as he let his hand drop back down, mustering his strength to kneel up straighter, clasping his hands behind his back. The very picture of perfect submission. He willed his voice not to crack.

'Please, Sir. Yes. I accept. I want all of it, all of *you*. I love you, Hannibal.'

Will watched as his words sunk in, watched the subtle ripple of emotion as it played out over Hannibal's features, the astonishing depth of feeling his words had wrought on that usually smooth face, an expression the like of which Will knew he might rarely see again. But Hannibal mastered himself quickly, even as Will felt a tear of his own escape to slide silently down his cheek.

Hannibal opened an inconspicuous latch at the back of the collar, manipulating some subtle locking mechanism Will wasn't likely meant to understand. It hinged open in two halves at an invisible pivot point under the front ring. Hannibal held it open so Will could take a closer look at the inside, revealing a blood-red, inlaid line, running fine and smooth and unbroken around the collar's inner circumference. Hannibal's pen-stroke rendered in gemstone. An unbroken red line forever holding him, keeping him, unyielding but precious, exacting but playful, simple but so very dear. It was perfect.

Hannibal returned Will's smile, indulging his curious gaze.

'It's red opal, Will. Inlaid into pure titanium. Unlike silver or platinum, or even leather, a titanium collar will not soon tarnish or break or bend. It will last a lifetime. *Our* lifetime. And before you worry, your training collar will not be lost to you. I know what it means to us both, and I expect to often choose it for more vigorous play.' Hannibal's eyes gleamed, reaching out to grasp Will's chin, running a thumb over his lower lip and sending a low throb through his exhausted body. 'But this collar, Will, this is your formal collar. It binds you to me, and me to you. You may never take it off. Only I will hold the key, and only I can choose to remove it, though I promise never to do so in anger or as punishment. It is mine, as you are, but more than anything it represents my unending commitment to you.'

Will's breath hitched. To be so completely accepted, claimed, *owned* … and to know that he owned Hannibal entirely in return…

Everything, everything, everything.

Will's throat clenched and his vision wavered. So he simply nodded, straightening his posture once again, shoulders back, chest out, chin up, knowing it would communicate his desire, his acceptance, his *pride,* even more than words ever could. But still, Hannibal searched his face, waiting for more. Will only managed a single word, but he hoped it spoke volumes.

'Please…'

Hannibal's slow smile was all he could have hoped for. Will held his breath as Hannibal bent slightly to put the collar around his neck, the cool metal coming to sit atop the tips of his clavicle, the ring in front settling perfectly in the divot there. Will let out a deep sigh as he felt the collar click shut, an unbroken circle, the finality of that sound locking out any old sense of doubt or loneliness.

Hannibal stood back, gazing down at him. They were both breathing hard, exhilaration mounting inside Will as Hannibal stared down at him, so proud, pulling him suddenly to his feet so that they were eye to eye, emotion blazing as he gripped Will's arms.

'This is all I've ever wanted for you, Will. For both of us.'

Will allowed those words to flow over and through him like the tide. Allowed his hands to unclasp and reach out to grasp this man in front of him, grounding himself as they swayed gently together. This man, who *saw* him, who looked directly at that thing inside him, that thing that craved and hungered, and *loved* him for it. And Will looked right back, both a smile and the heady taste of blood still on his lips, no longer shameful but glorious. This time the words were clear, simple…

'It's beautiful.'

Will leaned in then and kissed Hannibal, not waiting for an invitation or an order. He kissed him hard and deep and true, claiming him in turn. This man, his husband, his Sir. Will leapt for them both. Into a future he couldn't wait for them to share. Into everything they would be together.

When they had finally sated themselves, Will found the day had edged towards night, a blood-red setting sun bathing them in crimson and shadows. He let the calm wash over him as Hannibal slowly helped him dress, gentle lips brushing the cut on his throat, fingers lingering on the metal of his new collar, the marks on his skin, subtly checking him over once again.

Will's laughter echoed through the clearing as Hannibal, finally satisfied, scooped him up in his arms, declaring that he could, indeed, carry him all the way back to the house if he so wished. After indulging him for a few steps, Will huffed a laugh and slipped free, threading his arm through Hannibal's as they walked together back to the house, to the rest of their lives, to everything they'd ever wanted.

Every day, forever.

But not before surreptitiously checking to make sure the dead cricket he'd found was still secreted away, snug in his pocket.

After all, since they had the rest of their lives together, there would be plenty of beds to make.

And, with any luck, an unlimited supply of red pens.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it Fannibal Family! Thanks to each and every one of our dear readers for your seemingly infinite patience with us as we navigated some crazy crazy life (lots of good and lots of not so good). We know it's taken us a long time to finish, but all of your thoughtful comments and ravenous words of encouragement have meant so much to us as we inched towards getting this fic completed. We truly hope it was all worth the wait!

As always, kind comments, boosts, recs, and kudos are truly magical and we thank you for leaving them (really, they mean the world) 🙂

It's been a true joy to work on this together (we normally write alone but have loved every second of this partnership!), and we're just super pleased you all seem to have enjoyed reading this fic as much as we enjoyed writing it together and sharing it with you. ❤️

You can find us over on Twitter @MyDesignHanibl and @fragile_teacup and on Tumblr at thisismydesignhannibal and fragile-teacup.

End Notes

Comments and kudos are like nectar to us, feeding our creativity. If you like what you've read, we would be deeply appreciative of a little sugar. ;)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!